Speaking of Power: Politicisation, Hierarchy, and Language Ideologies in post-23J Spain

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Abstract

This thesis explains the increasing politicisation of Spain's minoritised languages during and after the 2023 general elections, and what this reveals about language ideologies and hierarchies. Bringing state and regional materials into one framework, it analyses party manifestos (2023, 2024), Spanish parliamentary debates (2023, 2025), and briefly discusses the bid for EU recognition of co-official languages (2023-2025). It asks how languages and speakers are discursively constructed in these texts, and how these discourses reproduce or disrupt hierarchy. Using the Discourse-Historical Approach within Critical Discourse Analysis, the study links textual strategies to socio-historical context. Findings show that the explicit positioning of language in party politics reorders or cements the asymmetries codified in Article 3 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution. Hierarchy persists where Castilian functions as the unmarked common medium and recognition of other languages remains largely symbolic. It is challenged where co-official languages are normalised as civic infrastructure, backed by enforceable obligations, budgets, and routine institutional use. The thesis models hierarchy across state, regional, and EU institutional scales, showing why recognition without material responsibility fails to shift practice.

Key Words:
Minoritised languages, Spain, multilingualism, ideology, hierarchy, Critical Discourse Analysis, language politics

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Abbreviations

PSOE: Partido Socialista Obredor Español [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party]

PSC: Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya [Socialist Party of Catalonia]

PSdeG: Partido dos Socialistas de Galicia [Socialist Party of Galicia]

PSE-EE: Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra [Socialist Party of the Basque Country-Basque Left]

PP: Partido Popular [People's Party]

PPC: Partido Popular de Catalunya [People's Party of Catalonia]

PPdeG: Partido Popular de Galicia [People's Party of Galicia]

ERC: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya [Republican Left of Catalonia]

CUP: Candidatura d'Unitat Popular [Popular Unity Candidacy]

BNG: Bloque Nacionalista Galego [Galician Nationalist Block]

EH Bildu: Euskal Herria Bildu [Basque Country Unite]

EAJ-PNV: Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea- Partido Nacionalista Vasco [Basque Nationalist Party]

BAC: Basque Autonomous Community

SSNP: Sub-State Nationalist Party

SWP: State-Wide Party

1.Introduction

In recent years, Spain's minoritised languages have become increasingly entangled with party politics. This has been especially visible since the 2023 general elections, with debates over the place of Catalan, Galician, and Basque in state institutions standing as a proxy for wider conflicts around sovereignty, pluralism, and national identity. While much work has been done on language ideologies and revitalisation in Spain (see for example O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013; Urla, 2012), these recent developments have, as of now, received less academic attention. It is in response to this gap that this thesis examines how political parties have framed and mobilised language as an issue in their discourse during this time frame. In doing so it situates linguistic debate as a central site where struggles over rights and symbolic capital are contested within multilingual contexts such as Spain.

Underlying this analysis is the recognition that language itself is not inherently political, rather it is a semiotic resource whose meanings emerge from use, not essence (Voloshinov, 1929/1986); Halliday, 1978). Yet it has been frequently mobilised as a political tool, both at the micro level (see Kirkham & Moore, 2016) and at the macro level (see Joseph, 2006). Such politicisation, however, is not static, there are moments when language debates recede and moments when they resurface as a flashpoint of political conflict.

Since 2023 Spain has entered one such period of heightened visibility and sensitivity to linguistic issues, both at the national level and within the Autonomous Communities. At the national level, debates over the recognition and use of Catalan, Galician, and Basque in parliament and in the European Union intersected with fragile coalition arithmetic, making language a key bargaining tool in government formation and stability. Meanwhile, debates about language continued to feature in the 2024 electoral campaigns in Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country. Together, these developments underscore how language has emerged as a site of renewed politicisation and contestation across Spain's layered political order.

This recent politicisation rests on a longer history of linguistic hierarchy. For example, early centralising projects, such as the reforms of the Bourbon monarchy in the eighteenth century already privileged Castilian over other languages (Medina, 2013). Franco would later expand and entrench such asymmetries, heavily suppressing the public use of minoritised languages

across administration, schooling, and media (especially in the early years of his regime), and consolidating Castilian as the only legitimate language of public life (Conversi, 1997, p. 37, p. 225; Nandi, 2018, p. 32). Despite this, these languages survived through family, clandestine schooling, cultural networks, and civic organisations that preserved linguistic competence and reframed the speaking minoritised languages as an act of resistance (Kullberg & Watson, 2022). As a result, by the return to democracy, while these languages had not disappeared, they remained fragile and in a subordinate position to Castilian, a situation which the political class sought to address in the 1978 constitution.

The legal basis of today's linguistic settlement was established in Article 3 of the 1978 Constitution[1], a linguistic expression of the broader balancing act between unitary and plural visions of Spain that its authors sought to strike (Encarnación, 2001). The article names Castilian as the sole official language of the state and the only one that citizens are obliged to learn. By contrast, the co-official languages were territorially limited, recognised only within their respective Autonomous Community. Furthermore, their use was considered a right rather than a duty[2], positioning them as optional, and as such subordinate to Castilian (Mar-Molinero, 1995, 2000). Moreover, in contrast to Castilian in the first clause, the second only refers to 'the other Spanish languages', detaching them from their cultural identities and homogenising them under the umbrella of Spanish, thereby implying secondary status. This asymmetry was reinforced in the third clause, which describes as "modalidades lingüísticas" [linguistic varieties], further distancing them from recognition as fully constituted languages. Taken together, Article 3 did not enshrine linguistic equality (indeed it is unclear if this was even the intention behind it), but instead embedded a hierarchical order in which Castilian was elevated as universal and obligatory, while the 'other languages' were left unnamed, territorially constrained, and discursively diminished.

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[1] "Artículo 3.
1. El castellano es la lengua española oficial del Estado. Todos los españoles tienen el deber de conocerla y el derecho a usarla.
2. Las demás lenguas españolas serán también oficiales en las respectivas Comunidades Autónomas de acuerdo con sus Estatutos.
3. La riqueza de las distintas modalidades lingüísticas de España es un patrimonio cultural que será objeto de especial respeto y protección." [Article 3. (1) Castilian is the official Spanish language of the State. All Spaniards have the duty to know it and the right to use it. (2) The other Spanish languages shall also be official in their respective Autonomous Communities in accordance with their Statutes. (3) The richness of Spain's different linguistic varieties is a cultural heritage that shall be given special respect and protection.] (Constitución Española, 1978, p. 3)

[2] Subsequent attempts of Autonomous Governments to oblige the learning of their community's language have been struck down by the courts, see for example (STC 31/2010).

It is against this background that this thesis seeks to answer the following question(s): How and why have Spain's minoritised languages become increasingly politicised through party politics during and after the 2023 general election, and what does this reveal about shifting language ideologies and linguistic hierarchies?

This is unpacked through 3 sub-questions:

1. How were minoritised languages discursively constructed in party manifestos at the state-wide (2023) and regional (2024) levels, and in Spanish state-level debates (2023-2025)?

2. How are these framings recontextualised by political parties across Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Autonomous Community? [3]

3. What do these discourses reveal about the reproduction or contestation of linguistic hierarchies and symbolic power in the Spanish state?

To address these questions, theory from several fields such as linguistic anthropology, sociology, and political science (Chapter 2) is combined with a methodology based on Wodak and Reisigl's (2001/2016) Discourse-Historical Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (Chapter 3). Empirical analysis begins in Chapters 4 and 5, which examine Spain-wide discourse. These chapters provide the foundation for the study, establishing the baseline against which the regional cases are examined, with events at the national level defining the terms in which questions of linguistic legitimacy have been contested over the past two years. These state-level dynamics are then complemented by three regional case studies, which analyse party manifestos from the 2024 elections in Catalonia (Chapter 6), Galicia (Chapter 7), and the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) (Chapter 8). Taken together, these cases show how discursive constructions of language both diverge and converge across regions and scales. Before turning to this analysis, however, it is first necessary to establish the theoretical

[3] The term Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) is used in place of "Basque Country" throughout this thesis, which could be interpreted to include regions outwith the scope of the analysis here, such as Iparralde or regions of Navarra.

lens through which the following chapters will approach the question of the politicisation of language in contemporary Spain.

2. Theoretical Background

Any discussion of linguistic inequality in plurilingual states must deal with two underlying questions: how do certain languages come to be valued over others, and why do these hierarchies persist? This section seeks to address these questions by exploring the entanglements of power, identity, and ideology in the construction and maintenance of linguistic hierarchies. Drawing on ideas from scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Kathryn Woolard, Michel Foucault, and Monica Heller, this review sets out a theoretical framework through which the mechanisms of linguistic dominance and minoritisation might be understood. In doing so, it traces how language becomes not only a marker of difference but a site of competition, authority, and resistance. This grounds the investigation of the politicisation of Catalan, Galician, and Basque and its consequences for language rights and hierarchies, while also guiding the analysis of political discourse in subsequent chapters.

2.1 An Exploration of Power and Hierarchy

Building primarily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis develops a theoretical account of linguistic inequality in plurilingual contexts. The following section draws on his ideas of capital, misrecognition, habitus, the marketplace, and hierarchy, supplemented by scholarship from other relevant academics such as Kathryn Woolard and Stephen May. In doing so these pages aim to lay out, in broad terms, how language inequalities come to be created and how they are sustained.

2.1.1 Capital, Habitus, and Marketplace

According to Bourdieu, prestige and recognition function as kinds of symbolic capital (of which linguistic capital could be considered a subset), which can be converted into economic advantage[4] (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989). As symbolic capital relies on recognition within a field,

[4] Yet, prestige and recognition cannot themselves be wholly separated from economic capital (Bourdieu, 1991/2009, p.18).

its value is relational (measured against those already in positions of prestige and power) with those closest to the field's dominant ideal holding the most symbolic capital. That is, value is assigned based on socially constructed classifications, mediated by the habitus[5], rather than intrinsic qualities (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 653; 2010/1979, p. 79). Applied to language, this means that speakers who are closest in their speech to a prestigious standard variety, or, in multilingual societies, to the dominant language, will accrue more symbolic capital than those who diverge.

This relational view of capital underpins Bourdieu's *linguistic marketplace*, an economy where different linguistic expressions hold varying values depending on the market in which they are used. In essence, the linguistic market is structured by the unequal distribution of linguistic capital. While in theory no one language is linguistically superior to another, in practice socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors bestow certain languages (and therefore speakers) with greater symbolic capital and therefore power than others (May, 2001, p. 134). The linguistic marketplace determines the legitimacy of a language or dialect, with a language's value largely dependent on the authority of its speakers and their position in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 654). Dominant groups impose their own standard as the sole institutional (and therefore legitimate) form of expression, thus rendering other forms of expression subordinate (Bourdieu, 1991/2009, p. 45). The process of *symbolic violence* then ensures that those subjected to linguistic subordination come to perceive their own speech as inadequate, reinforcing the legitimacy of the dominant language (Bourdieu, 1991/2009, p. 37). However, the value given to a specific language or variety is not fixed, and just as broader power dynamics can shift according to place and time, so too can the value of a given language or linguistic expression shift in response to market conditions (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 651-652). For example, what may be a prestige variety in a niche marketplace, may in turn have less linguistic capital in the context of the broader integrated linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991/2009, p. 18).

Such shifting valuations show the linguistic marketplace, not only as a site of interaction, but also of competition. This competition, however, is unequal due to the very sociolinguistic

[5] The habitus is a historically constructed, "generative" system of internalised dispositions that shapes how individuals perceive and act, producing practices that both reflect and reproduce the social conditions from which they arise. It operates collectively, enabling a shared worldview and coordinated practices within a group or class without requiring explicit rules or conscious coordination (Bourdieu, 1972/2010, pp.78-85).

stratification for which the linguistic marketplace is responsible (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 652). As such, each linguistic exchange ultimately serves to reinforce and reproduce pre-existing hierarchies.

2.1.2 Hierarchy

Linguistic hierarchy is constructed and maintained through the mechanisms of linguistic capital and the linguistic marketplace. Within these arrangements, linguistic practices are evaluated against those of the dominant class, with the effect that non-dominant forms are systematically devalued (Bourdieu, 1991/2009, pp. 53-54). Such hierarchies are not only imposed from above but also internalised through the habitus (see 2.1.1), which influences speakers' practice and perception in ways that reproduce the existing social order (Bourdieu, 1972/2010, p. 72). In this sense, hierarchy comes to appear inescapable.

These hierarchies are constructed by dominant groups, who stratify difference to maintain their own societal advantage (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 372).Through misrecognition (the taken-for-granted legitimacy of a dominant language or variety), symbolic violence naturalises that dominance, enabling those with the most linguistic capital to convert it into symbolic advantage while concealing their efforts and interests in doing so (Bourdieu, 1991/2009; 1979/2010, p. 79). Accordingly, hierarchies persist not only through force but also through consent (hegemony, see 2.1.3), processes that generate inequality (Bourdieu, 1979/2010, p. 389).

At the level of individual practice, speakers internalise these hierarchies through their linguistic habitus, unconsciously adjusting their linguistic behaviour based on their perceived social worth and market expectations (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 659). This ensures the continued reproduction of linguistic domination without the need for overt coercion. These hierarchies are also reproduced at an institutional level, for example through the education system where certain linguistic practices are sanctioned while others are marginalised (Bourdieu, 1989, 1991/2009). Considering this, it becomes clear that linguistic hierarchy is not only a reflection of economic and social inequalities but an active force in their reproduction. For example, in a multilingual state, such as Spain, the capacity to impose a definition of

legitimate, standard, or official language is itself a form of symbolic power, which derives its strength precisely from being misrecognised as neutral.

While at the simplest level, one could argue that such hierarchies are two-tier, with the standard occupying a position above any other language or variety in a region, this can often be broken down further. Many multilingual states display a stratified order with the national/dominant language at the top, followed by co-official or recognised languages, then protected languages, with unprotected languages at the bottom (Ramallo, 2018, p. 462).

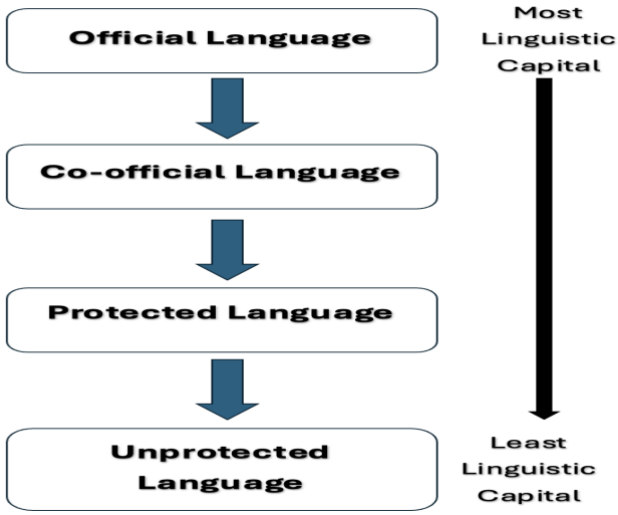

Fig.1-2 Diagram of the typical linguistic hierarchy in a multilingual state.

Figure 1 visualises this order.[6] Read from top to bottom, each tier represents a language's legal/institutional status within a state. The vertical arrow marks a gradient of linguistic capital. To use the example of Spain: the "official" language enjoys the greatest level of linguistic capital; 'co-official' languages have territorially bounded rights and partial institutional reach; "protected" varieties receive symbolic recognition and limited funding but weak enforceability; and "unprotected" languages lack standing and are largely confined to family/community domains.

Such hierarchies are often naturalised through a metaphor of 'linguistic Darwinism' which attributes dominance to inherent strength (May, 2001, p. 3; Kymlicka, 2003, pp. 107-108). This rhetoric fuels a vicious cycle in which minoritised languages are framed as symptoms of decline, depressing their linguistic capital and reinforcing harmful narratives (Fishman, 1991,

[6] While it is a useful guide to understanding the position of different languages in a multilingual context, it is noted that this framework (and therefore the diagram) abstracts from within-tier variation (e.g., niche markets, covert prestige) and from cross-state differences.

p. 23). Efforts to raise a minoritised language's prestige within a hierarchy organised around a hegemonic standard frequently fail to disrupt the established order because the dominant language remains the comparative source of authority (Jaffe, 1999/2010, p. 45).

Finally, just as there exists a hierarchy between minoritised and hegemonic language, so too does there exist a hierarchy within minoritised language communities. One way in which minoritised speaker communities are stratified is by the concept of 'nativeness'. This opposition of the new vs the native speaker, can lead to so-called *new speakers* facing increased difficulty accessing already niche linguistic marketplaces due to a perceived lack of authenticity (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013).

2.1.3 Hegemony

Hegemony refers to the deep-rooted legitimisation of the authority of a dominant group, which is not merely enforced through coercion but maintained through consent and social reproduction (Williams, 1992). Eagleton (1994), building on Gramsci's model of hegemony, frames it as the means by which ruling classes secure consent through a combination of ideological and structural mechanisms, i.e. either through explicit policy or through implicit social practices. In terms of linguistic practice, this means the recognition and acceptance of the authority of speakers of the legitimised standard, even by those who do not use it themselves (Woolard, 1985, p. 741; see section 2.1.2 on misrecognition).

Woolard sets out three conditions for linguistic hegemony. First, she argues, there must be complicity, as changes made to behaviour under coercive circumstances are more likely to be undone in the absence of such pressures (Woolard, 1985, pp. 741-742). Second is a more integrated linguistic market, which narrows access to alternative legitimacy (Woolard, 1985, p. 741). However, linguistic markets are never fully integrated, and the existence of niche or private markets ensure domains where subordinate varieties can enjoy a level of covert prestige (Trudgill, 1972; Blommaert, 1999/2010, p. 11). Finally, and related to the previous point, is the erasure of historical roots which she describes as "language laundering" occurring through the institutions of the state (Woolard, 2016, p. 29).

While a hegemonic standard language is often treated as a precursor to the construction of the nation-state, it can also be argued that the existence of such a standard is reliant on the existence of hegemonic institutions among which the nation-state itself can be counted (Billig, 1995; Silverstein, 1996, p. 286). When a language is used in or '*laundered*' through such institutional settings, this represents both a constitution and reproduction of the ideological hegemony of the nation-state and its dominant language (Philips, 1998, p. 212). As a result of this constant reproduction, those with the greatest linguistic capital come to equate the dominant language's hegemony with their own identity, so revitalisation efforts read as attacks on the self (Spolsky, 2005, p. 257). Furthermore, even those who do not control the national standard can be complicit in its hegemony, with speakers that shift toward dominant linguistic practices holding higher symbolic capital than those who do not (Fishman, 1991, p. 60). The effect is to both cement the hegemonic status of the dominant language and contribute to the minoritisation of their own.

2.1.4 Foucault and Power

Woolard (1985) and Irvine (1989) critique Bourdieu's work as determinist and for oversimplifying the complicity of minoritised language speakers. In other words, they argue that Bourdieu's use of the habitus to explain people's behaviours and practices underestimates both the potential for individual agency and the fluidity of power relations. However, these critiques do not invalidate or disqualify Bourdieu's theories from being applied to work on minoritised languages. This framework can, however, be strengthened by addressing these critiques through a Foucauldian lens, offering a more dynamic understanding of social behaviours that recognises both structural influences and individual agency.

Both theorists (Bourdieu and Foucault) recognise that power operates through social practices and discourses, influencing how individuals navigate their social environments. However, in his work, Foucault emphasises the fluidity and multiplicity of power relations, arguing that power is not simply a resource to be accumulated but is constantly produced and reproduced through interactions and discourses (Foucault, 1975,1976/1978). This suggests that the value of language and the meanings attached to it are contingent upon the specific contexts and power relations at play. Power is exercised from numerous points within a society, rather than

being concentrated in a single institution or authority. That is, power is not solely a top-down force, it emerges from everyday social relationships and interactions (Foucault 1978, p. 94).

In *Surveiller et Punir* [Discipline and Punish] (1975), Foucault explores how power operates through disciplinary mechanisms that regulate behaviour across institutions such as schools, prisons, and hospitals. These mechanisms establish norms and standards that individuals internalise, resulting in self-regulation and, ultimately, a society in which conformity is maintained without the need for overt coercion (Foucault, 1975). Moreover, Foucault reminds us that where there is power, there is always resistance, which may take multiple forms (Foucault et al., 2004)[7]. If power is understood to be everywhere, then resistance, or at least the potential for it, must also be ever-present. This perspective suggests that individuals are not merely shaped by their social environments but are actively engaged in negotiating power relations. In turn, this understanding of power and resistance invites attention to localised, everyday acts of resistance that may fall outside traditional narratives of power.

In sum, while Bourdieu's work provides a macro-level, broad strokes, framework of power relations and hierarchy which can be applied across various contexts, Foucault's work can supplement this by highlighting the influence of individual interactions on shifting power relations. That is to say, that while individuals are influenced by their social conditions, they also possess the capacity to navigate and transform those conditions. Rather than contradicting Bourdieu's theories, incorporating the work of Michel Foucault makes clear that the influence of habitus and capital need not negate the possibility of agency, rather it contextualises this agency in the broader social field.

2.2. Language, Identity, and the Nation

If section 2.1 sought to explain how power stratifies the linguistic field, section 2.2 examines how language comes to be lived as identity and how that attachment is mobilised politically. In short, the focus shifts from the reproduction of inequality to the nation-building work that language performs.

[7] Foucault passed away in 1984, this references a book of his lectures between 1977 and 1978, first published in 2004.

2.2.1 Language and the Construction of Identity

At the simplest level one might consider identity as an attempt to define oneself in relation to others. That is to say that one's own individual and collective identity is built by the degree one identifies with or differentiates themselves from other individuals and groups (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Language, as the principal means by which we interact with each other and our surroundings, is an invaluable tool in the construction of the self. In this way, to be denied access to one's language is to be denied one's identity.[8] Beyond individual self-identification, language allows us to identify one another. At the macro level, languages can operate as signs of collective belonging (Kramsch, 2014, p. 32), while in everyday exchanges, speech carries cues that index[9] certain social characteristics or positioning (Gumperz, 1982, p. 27). In other words, language is key to the construction, perception, and negotiation of identity, as it can index both collective and individual subjectivities and practices (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003, p. 37).

However, this does not mean that identities should be viewed as stable and unchanging, or that the indexical links between certain linguistic forms and sociocultural identities are necessarily fixed. Rather, identity should be understood as a fluid and socially constructed phenomenon, which is produced and reproduced through habitual practice and performance (within a framework of societal constraints) (Butler, 1990; Woolard, 2016, p. 35). In this vein, language, viewed as embodied and situated social practice (something we do rather than possess), rather than a bounded and pre-existing system, can be said to be an engine of identity production (Pennycook, 2010, p. 2). That is, identity can be said to be constructed through continuous discourse(s) delineating the self and others. It can therefore be argued that it is open to constant negotiation and redefinition through our speech and interactions (Benwell & Stokoe, 2011).[10]

For speakers of dominant languages linguistic practices are typically unmarked, therefore this identity reproduction proceeds more passively and below the level of conscious awareness.

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[8] That is not to go as far as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language determines thought and perception, only to recognise the social and symbolic ties between language and identity. For critiques of Sapir-Whorf's linguistic relativity see Chomsky (1957, 1965, 1968) and Pinker (1994).

[9] Indexicality describes how linguistic forms 'point to' or signal aspects of context (e.g. identity). Through recurrent use, these forms acquire conventional social meanings that listeners draw on to interpret who is speaking and what is being done (Silverstein, 1996).

[10] See also further work on stance e.g. Jaffe (2009).

(Gal, 1989). By contrast, among minoritised speakers, linguistic practice is marked (socially noticeable relative to the unmarked norm) which makes language choice an active site of social positioning and often heightens metalinguistic awareness (Heller, 2007). In this way, the importance and role of language for identity formation varies with speakers' position and experience (May, 2001, p. 135).

At the societal level, language helps produce identity and meaning through its interaction with social, political, and spatial structures (Pennycook, 2010). In multilingual states such as Spain, these dynamics map onto internal borders, producing sub-state national identities and raising the broader question of language and the nation, taken up in the next section.

2.2.2 Language and the Nation

In the European context, language's role in the construction of collective identity is most visible in debates about the nation and the nation-state. *Nation* is defined here as a people sharing a culture, of which language is a key pillar, and who are typically associated with a common territory (Smith, 1991; Kymlicka, 2003, p. 11). [11]

Two canonical accounts clarify the role of language in the formation of the nation. Philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, a foundational thinker on language's role in nation-building, saw the nation as a naturally occurring community rooted in, and unified by, a common language (Herder, 1772/2002). According to Herder, language has the unique ability to embody the spirit of a people (*Volksgeist*), acting as the basis of cultural transmission (Bauman & Briggs, 2000/2003, p. 173). In contrast to this vision of the nation as an organic entity, Anderson (2006) describes nations as socially constructed 'imagined communities'. However, language still plays a key role in Anderson's model, with his argument that the shared practice of reading, brought to the masses by the onset of print capitalism, allowed people who would never meet in person to imagine themselves as part of a single community (the nation).

By contrast, the *state*, in the tradition of Weber, can be defined as an institutional structure with supreme political power within a set of fixed geographical borders. It alone can exercise

[11] See Smith (1991) for a more comprehensive list of common features of nations such as religion and shared myths.

'legitimate force', and it is sustained by the recognition and support of the population (May, 2001, p. 55). Many countries today are therefore defined as *nation-states*, although it is rare for the states and the nation to overlap fully (Mar-Molinero, 2000, pp. 5-6). For example, Spain's historic nationalities (Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Autonomous Community), represent a case of multiple nations within a single nation-state. May terms these "proto nations" or "nations without a state", many of which hold the goal of achieving statehood (May, 2001, pp. 55, 85). This is what Gellner (1983) terms *nationalism*: the contention that the political and national unit should be as one. Given language's constitutive role in nation formation, its recurrent mobilisation in nationalist discourses is unsurprising, especially in multilingual contexts where hierarchies are contested and languages are minoritised (Fishman, 1973).

2.2.3 Language and Nationalism

If language is a central pillar of individual, collective, and national identity, it follows that nationalism, concerned with preserving and promoting national identity, has evolved, in part, to defend linguistic heritage (Shabad & Gunther, 1982, p. 447). In doing so, nationalist projects have generated a wide range of language ideologies (see 2.3) aimed at protecting, legitimising, and cementing the position of standardised national languages. As such, nationalism operates less as a singular, fixed ideology, and more as a supra-ideological framework which encompasses various, at times competing or contradictory, ideologies within it.

While nationalism often presents language as a pre-existing foundation of national identity, it is speakers who "notice, justify, and rationalise" differences between languages, and weave them into larger ideological narratives of belonging and nationality (Gal & Irvine, 1995, pp. 992-993). This challenges conceptions of the national language as an organic, pre-existing foundation of the nation, showing it to be historically constructed and ideologically produced (Joseph, 2004, p. 115; Billig, 1995, p. 30). This helps to explain the exclusionary dynamics that arise when linguistic diversity is viewed by dominant groups as a threat to the coherence of the nation-state.

Not every linguistically distinct group has its own nation-state. Where nations and states do not coincide, contact between languages is often framed as a threat to the integrity of the nation-state, thus resulting in conflict (Heller, 1999/2010, p. 160; Darquennes, 2015). Groups who do not command, or refuse to defer to, the national standard are thus minoritised, with language acting as both the means of their oppression and as a resource for resistance. Yet this rarely alters the perceived desirability of the nation-state as the end goal for these communities. The goal, it seems, is not to change the system, but to reproduce it at the level of their own community. In this sense it seems that nationalism is not necessarily escapable, rather one can argue that it is recursively reproduced, both downwards as sub-state nationalism (e.g. Catalonia) and upwards as pan-nationalism (e.g. a European bloc positioned to compete with China or the USA) (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003).

The normalisation of state nationalism in everyday life helps to explain the durability of these patterns. Although public debate often equates nationalism with independence movements (e.g. Scotland or Catalonia), it is not confined to nations without a state. Rather, it occurs across institutional levels and levels of consciousness. Billig (1995) argues that nationalism at the level of the nation-state is continuously reproduced through ‘banal’ (i.e. unremarkable or unnoticed) acts, ensuring that it remains central in citizens' consciousness without requiring explicit acknowledgment. He compares this to the “hot” nationalism of minority groups which is constantly remarked upon, as it challenges what many citizens have come to see as the natural order (Billig, 1995, pp. 43-46). In addition, one could argue that the rise of the far-right as a powerful political force across Europe has involved the reemergence of what we might term ‘Big P’ political nationalism at the state-wide level. That is to say, a ‘hot’, party-centred nationalism that mobilises the nation-state as an explicit electoral project, foregrounding homogeneity, reasserting a singular standard language, and casting minority multilingualism as a threat to cohesion and sovereignty. In short, ‘banal nationalism’ functions as the enabling infrastructure for the activation of ‘hot’ party politics.

Through this dynamic, political nationalism has become entrenched as a structural feature of the modern-nation state, able to adapt to shifting contexts both domestically and internationally. In theory, as nationalist discourse shifts from the ethnic towards the civic as we enter a new ‘network age’ of globalisation and the institutions of the nation-state lose power and capacity to those in control of informational flows, theories of language being rooted in territory and space should become less relevant (Castells, 1996/2010). In practice, however, it seems that the pace of change and perceived harms caused by globalisation have

led people to seek the certainty provided by the nation and the state (Castells, 1997/2009). This theory is borne out when one looks at the electoral success of populist and nationalist parties around the world, starting with the left in the wake of the 2008 financial crash, followed by the far-right in more recent years. Rather than dissolving nationalism, it could be argued that globalisation has enabled its rearticulation, with nation-state projects mobilising against homogenising pressures while centralising authority domestically. Ironically, many of those who utilise nationalist discourse in their critique of globalisation often oppose sub-state nationalists in their own contexts, calculating that internal fragmentation may diminish the power of the broader nation-state on the international stage.

Having examined nationalism here, Section 2.3 now turns to a discussion of language ideologies, which are deployed within the framework of nationalism and perpetuate the linguistic hierarchies discussed in Section 2.1.

2.3. Ideology

The term ideology, although often understood as political in its quotidian usage, relates to a set of ideas, beliefs, and practices that frame individuals' understanding of social reality, primarily occurring below the level of consciousness (Althusser, 1971). Ideologies often function to sustain and legitimise power structures, often by representing them as natural or self-evident (Eagleton, 1994). In this mode ideologies have been construed as a kind of distorted communication by dominant groups, which serves to prevent rational discourse, naturalise inequalities, and supress debate (Habermas, 1981/1984). However, ideology can also be positively interpreted as a means of contesting dominant power structures (Van Dijk, 1998).

To talk of language ideologies then, is to explore the beliefs and practices which arise from the relationship(s) between people and language within a given social context (Woolard, 1998, p. 20). These ideologies can be seen as the reasoning behind our linguistic choices, both on a metalinguistic and an implicit level (Silverstein, 1979, p. 193). As alluded to above, they involve the distortion of and infusion of language with political meaning, with the aim of using it as a tool to maintain or disrupt the established social order (Voloshinov, 1929/1986). This is effective as ideologies are constantly being reproduced at individual, collective, and

institutional levels through repeated practice (Blommaert, 1999/2010, p. 10). Furthermore, as language ideologies stem from social experiences, such ideologies are both many and heterogeneous, reflecting the makeup of the societies in which they exist (Kroskrity, 2000/2003, p. 12). In this way, not only do language ideologies shape both collective and individual perspectives but are themselves shaped by the wider socio-economic and socio-political context (Paffey, 2012, p. 16).

2.3.1 The semiotic construction of language ideologies

Much like language itself, language ideologies are not naturally occurring but constructed. The main three "semiotic processes" through which such ideologies are constructed, reproduced, and cemented are: iconisation, fractal recursivity, and erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003, pp. 36-37).

The first of these is iconisation, which transforms linguistic features from indices of social groups into iconic representations of them (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003, p. 37). In other words, while indexicality involves linguistic features pointing to groups through association, iconisation transforms these features into naturalised symbols, perceived as embodying the inherent essence or character of these groups. The second of these processes is fractal recursivity, which replicates patterns of sociolinguistic opposition across different levels and scales, resulting in either the reinforcement of broader categories or the subdivision of groups into more specific ones (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003, p. 38). Taking Spain as an example: the hierarchical relationship between Castilian (Spanish) and the co-official languages, in which Castilian holds the dominant position, can be projected to an international level, where it itself may be subordinate to English within global organisations. Conversely, at a sub-state level, a co-official language (such as Catalan) may marginalise other, smaller minoritised languages within its own territory (e.g. Aranese), replicating similar patterns of linguistic hierarchy to those which they are themselves subjected to (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998, p. 205). Finally, is erasure, a process in which facts that do not fit with an ideological narrative are disregarded. However, in cases where such facts are perceived as problematic, that is to say actively involved in a competing semiotic process, they are not just overlooked but erased entirely (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003, pp. 38-39).

2.3.2 Anonymity vs Authenticity

Language ideologies are often subject to debates which in turn come to define them (Blommaert, 1999/2010, p. 10). As such, they are often presented as oppositions e.g. anonymity vs authenticity or pride vs profit. Debates such as these are key to how minoritised languages are perceived, in turn affecting language policy and, therefore, language maintenance and shift.

An anonymous language is a dominant language. Or rather, anonymity is often described as a precursor to such dominance. When the roots of a language are obscured and abstracted, it is able to move beyond local identity, and as such be presented as 'unmarked' and therefore more suitable for broad national communication (Woolard, 2016, p. 25). In other words, by belonging to nobody the dominant language can represent everybody (Del Valle, 2007, p. 53). Consequently, anonymity has come to be relabelled in some literature as authority (Woolard, 2016). This shift makes visible the institutional construction of 'the standard', which is later stabilised through policy and routine practice. These standardising ideologies are often misrecognised as commonsense (in academic as well as public discourse), making the standard appear both natural and incontestable (Kroskrity, 2000/2003, pp. 26-27).

By contrast, authenticity draws its value from being rooted in a community, i.e. being *from somewhere* (Woolard, 2016, p. 22). While authenticity might protect a language from further decline, it may simultaneously prevent that same language from gaining further prestige or power (Del Valle, 2007, p. 139). That is to say that while a community's sense of ownership can sustain a language, overemphasising authenticity and nativeness may discourage new speakers and limit expansion of the language beyond traditional communities (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2015). This highlights a major challenge in language revitalisation, where a balance must be struck between preservation of a language's cultural significance and its ability to adapt to shifting sociolinguistic landscapes.

2.3.3 Pride vs Profit

Another opposition of ideologies is the distinction between pride and profit (Heller and Duchêne, 2012). Pride frames languages as symbols of identity and citizenship, with

standardised national languages often being institutionalised as representations of nation-state unity. By contrast, profit, recasts language as a commodifiable resource (Heller & Duchêne, 2012, pp. 4-8). One interpretation (an overtly economic echo of Bourdieu's linguistic capital) is that standard national languages embody profit through their universality, while minoritised languages index pride. This is not to say that minoritised languages are not also commodified, both through marketed 'authenticity' (e.g., tourism) and as multilingual skills that open additional linguistic and economic markets (Heller, 2010, pp. 102-103).

This demonstrates that despite being framed as a binary opposition, one ideology does not entirely replace the other. Indeed, it could be argued that in the 2020s both are employed within nationalist and economic discourses on language.

2.3.4 Standardisation

Standardisation refers to the ideological and practical process through which a chosen language variety is codified and accepted as the legitimate societal norm (Haugen, 1966, p. 933; Gal, 2017). In the model of *anonymity* discussed above, the standard can be said to define an entire political territory precisely because it is framed as not belonging to one single group and is thus often a key part of nation-building efforts (Gal & Woolard, 2001/2014, p. 8). Standardisation is achieved through granting prestige to speakers of one variety and marginalising speakers of non-dominant languages and varieties (Paffey, 2012, p. 49). Acordingly, the closer to the standard one is, the more prestige and communicative currency they will possess (Moreno Cabrera, 2008, pp. 96-97; Spolsky, 2004, p. 27). As a result, the standard comes to be seen as the only correct form of communication, and a belief in its inherent superiority takes hold. Ideologies around the supremacy of the standard are omnipresent and thus inescapable, being reproduced through the education system and reinforced by the work of language academies such as the Real Academia Española[12] [Royal Spanish Academy] in Spain.

The success of standardisation, as with ideology more generally, lies in making people forget it was constructed at all (Billig, 1995, p. 37; Woolard, 1998, p. 21). Those who control the dominant standard are less likely to see non-dominant languages as natural (Silverstein, 1996,

[12] This is commonly abbreviated at the RAE.

p. 286), while portraying the standard as emerging organically feeds into ideologies of linguistic Darwinism discussed in section 2.1.2. Given this, standardisation is perhaps *the* key process in the creation and embedding of linguistic hierarchy within the modern nation-state. That is to say that without an ideology or ideological process of standardisation, the linguistic structure of the nation-state would likely take a markedly different form.

2.4 Policy and Revitalisation

Language policies are language ideologies made manifest. They represent the exercise of power through institutions and through individual and collective community choices. As such, they both reflect and contribute to the survival and revitalisation of minoritised languages. Following Spolsky (2004, p. 5), language policy comprises ideology, practice, and management (interventions aiming to influence practice). It may be either explicit or implicit (Spolsky, 2004, p. 39).

Explicit policy concerns formally stated rules, laws, and regulations that are often associated with the state or its institutions. Bochmann (2018, p. 434) identifies four key levels at which such language policy functions: status planning (the assigning of official roles to certain languages), corpus planning (the processes of language standardisation), international language policy (which governs the promotion or preservation of languages across national boundaries), and discourse conventions (the influence of political ideologies on language use). In practice, these often favour a single dominant standard, reinforced by language academies (such as the RAE) and purist ideologies, even in cases where a state claims to support linguistic diversity (Spolsky, 2004, p. 22). As such, state policies tend to reflect hegemonic power structures and routinely marginalise non-dominant languages (Nelde, 1996, p. 42). For example, in multilingual contexts such as Spain, the central state will often ignore language policy by devolving it to regional legislatures (Ramallo, 2018, p. 465), where attempts to meaningfully reshape the linguistic settlement can be frustrated by the constitutional courts.

Implicit (or unofficial) language policy, on the other hand, refers to unspoken norms and practices, and can often have a greater impact on actual language use than official policy (Schiffman, 1996). This is especially true in situations where state policy is either absent or

lacking, forcing individuals in minoritised language communities to take policy into their own hands (Nandi et al., 2023).

This differentiation between policy types raises the question of whether revitalisation is the responsibility of the state or of communities themselves. That is, whether language revitalisation merits active state intervention or whether it should be a matter of negative rights, where the state does nothing to suppress a language, but also takes no responsibility for its survival (Grin, 2003, p. 81). On one hand, there is the classical liberal view that there is already linguistic equality (everyone can speak the national language) and that minority cultural and linguistic rights are sufficiently protected through democratic freedoms of expression and association (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 107). Through this lens, the maintenance of a given minoritised language is a matter for individuals- if a language is "valuable" or "worth saving" then individuals will sustain it through choice (Kymlicka, 2003, pp. 107-108). However, this ignores structural disadvantages. While speakers may nominally have the right to use their language, if it is excluded from education, administration, and the economy, their "choice" is severely constrained (Mar-Molinero, 2000, p. 71). Even when language revitalisation efforts are introduced, the social and economic devaluation of minoritised languages means that speakers may abandon them despite legal protection (May, 2001, p. 147).

At the community level revitalisation efforts can flounder by becoming embroiled in linguistic purism and an overemphasis on "nativeness". For example, Fishman's work on reversing language shift (RLS) has been critiqued for its narrow focus on intergenerational transmission and for essentialising language as the property of specific ethnic groups (Romaine, 2006). This emphasis on the authentic native speaker can exclude new speakers from discourse on revitalisation efforts, making the language less accessible to wider populations (Woolard, 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, the amplification and mythologising of concepts such as nativeness can harm revitalisation efforts by discouraging new speakers who stand to lose the authority of the dominant language without being viewed as sufficiently authentic to gain access to the niche markets of the minoritised language (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013, pp. 290, 297-299).

Fundamentally, recognition without redistribution cannot sustain minoritised languages. Language policy is not just about managing linguistic diversity, it is about deciding who gets to participate fully in society and on what terms. The challenge is to move beyond simply

preserving languages as cultural artefacts and instead ensure that they remain widely used in all areas of life. Achieving this relies not only on individual agency nor solely on state-action, but on a combination of top-down and bottom-up efforts.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to establish the theoretical framework on which this thesis will base its analysis of Spain's linguistic inequalities and politicalisation of language. While Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and the linguistic marketplace explain the mechanisms through which linguistic hierarchies are produced and maintained, work from key thinkers such as Foucault and Woolard strengthen this understanding through further explanations of power, hegemony, and ideology. These works highlight the negotiated nature of power as well as the role of individual agency, allowing for the possibility of resistance and reconfiguration, particularly within minoritised language communities. The fluid yet essential relationship between language, identity, and the nation-state adds a further layer to this analysis, as the construction of national identity through language, and the ideological processes which sustain this, are central to understanding how linguistic hierarchies are embedded within state structures and nationalist projects. Finally, this chapter has underscored the role of language policy as both an instrument of state power and a site of ideological struggle, through which linguistic inequalities are institutionalised but also contested. Chapter 3 now details the methodological choices that connect this discussion to the analyses that follow in the empirical chapters (4-6).

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter seeks to provide a detailed account of the thesis' methodological framework. This is based around the main research question and three subquestions:

How and why have Spain's minoritised languages become increasingly politicised through party politics during and after the 2023 general election, and what does this reveal about shifting language ideologies and linguistic hierarchies?

1. How were minoritised languages discursively constructed in party manifestos at the state-wide (2023) and regional (2024) levels, and in Spanish state-level debates (2023-2025)?

2. How are these framings recontextualised by political parties across Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Autonomous Community?

3. What do these discourses reveal about the reproduction or contestation of linguistic hierarchies and symbolic power in the Spanish state?

To answer these questions a qualitative and interpretive approach is adopted, rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as laid out by Reisigl & Wodak (2001/2016). This allows for a contextualised analysis of texts, which are viewed as situated social practices shaped by history, ideology, and power. The next sections set out the corpus design, as well as the analytical framework and procedures used to examine it.

3.2 Corpus Construction

Analysis is based on a corpus[13] of political texts produced between 2023 and 2025. 'Political texts' here refers primarily to Manifestos from the 2023 Spanish general elections, and the 2024 autonomous elections written by the political parties under investigation. Transcripts from 2 debates (one in Congress and one in the Senate) at the state-level, provided by the Cortes Generales, were also analysed. In total the corpus was therefore made up of 23 documents (21 manifestos and 2 parliamentary debate transcripts).

The corpus is designed to show how Catalan, Galician, and Basque are discursively constructed at both state-wide and regional levels, with the aim of understanding how such framings reflect and contribute to the politicisation of language. Party manifestos were prioritised as texts that formally codify party positions and authoritatively project their ideological stance to the electorate. In the state-wide analysis (Chapter 5), relevant parliamentary debates were also included as arenas where party stances are enacted and contested within the institutional framework of the Spanish state.

In the state-wide chapters (Chapters 4 and 5), the analysis centres on the four major parties with parliamentary presence across Spain: Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Partido Popular (PP), Sumar, and VOX.[14] These parties set the boundaries of national debate and provide contrasting models of statehood and identity, through which linguistic hierarchies are reproduced or contested. It would be neither practicable nor analytically relevant to examine every party represented in the Cortes Generales, due to their number and the fact that many have only minimal parliamentary presence or limited engagement with language politics. Concentrating on the principal state-wide parties (SWPs) in these initial chapters ensures attention to the actors that most decisively structure national debate and whose discourses circulate most widely.

In the regional chapters (Chapters 6 to 8), the corpus includes the parties that secured representation in the most recent (2024) regional elections. In Catalonia these are Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC), PP, En Comú Podem, VOX, Junts, Esquerra Republicana de

[13] Links to corpus material can be found in the appendix.
[14] Translations: PSOE- Spanish Socialist Worker's Party; PP- People's Party; Sumar- Unite.

Catalunya (ERC), the Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP), and Aliança Catalana.[15] In Galicia: Partido dos Socialistas de Galicia (PSdeG), PPdeG, and Bloque Nacionalista Galego.[16] Finally, in the Basque Autonomous Community: Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra (PSE-EE), PP, Sumar, VOX, Partido Nacionalista Vasco- Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea (PNV-EAJ), and Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu).[17] This reflects the full range of discourses of the parties elected to the relevant autonomous parliaments. The only exception is Democracia Ourensana [Ourense Democracy] in Galicia, represented by a single member of parliament (*diputado*), whose programme was excluded on the grounds that its predominantly provincialist focus offered no substantive engagement with language politics. Furthermore, as the grounding analysis that sets the frame of reference for the regional studies, the Spain-wide chapters are correspondingly longer in word count.

This research adopts a case-study design, enabling comparison between Spain-wide debates and the regional cases of Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Autonomous Community. There are elements of cross-comparison throughout, but this is done most explicitly in Chapter 9. The timeframe of 2023 to 2025 was chosen because it represents a clear moment when language and politics were consciously and circumstantially intertwined at the highest levels of Spanish political power, forming part of party-political discourse in election campaigns at both state-wide and regional levels, and permeating institutional debate in Madrid. This focus grounds the study in the immediacy of contemporary debates, capturing language politics as they unfold in real time.

3.3 Analytical Framework

As referenced in the introduction to this chapter, examination of the corpus is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, with a particular focus on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). This framework was chosen because it combines close linguistic analysis with attention to historical context, intertextuality, and the social and political conditions in which

[15] Translations: PSC- Socialists' Party of Catalonia; En Comú Podem- In Common We Can; Junts- together; ERC- Catalan Republican Left; CUP- Popular Unity Candidacy; Aliança Catalana- Catalan Alliance.
[16] Translations: PSdeG- Socialist Party of Galicia; BNG- Galician Nationalist Block.
[17] Translations: PSE-EE - Socialist Party of the Basque Country- Basque Left; PNV-EAJ- Basque Nationalist Party; EH Bildu- Basque Country Unite

discourse is produced (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001/2016). In line with broader CDA it treats texts as interventions in broader ideological struggles (Fairclough, 1989,1995; Van Dijk, 1993). This makes it well suited to a study of Spanish language politics, as discourses about co-official languages are deeply embedded in questions of history, identity, and legitimacy.

The DHA defines a set of discursive strategies for analysis. Those used here are: nomination (how actors, groups, and languages are labelled, e.g. Catalan as llengua pròpia[18]); predication (qualities ascribed, e.g. policies cast as *imposiciones*, *barreras, etc…*); argumentation (through *topoi*[19] of rights, freedom, justice, efficiency, threat); perspectivisation (who speaks, with what viewpoint and what authority); and mitigation/intensification (Wodak & Reisigl, 2001/2016, p. 33). While these strategies are explicitly named in Chapter 4, subsequent chapters generally use less jargonistic terms for the sake of readability. Analysis was also informed by a wider set of theoretical tools discussed in the previous chapter.

The analysis also acknowledges the multimodal character of political communication. While the primary focus is on written texts, attention was paid to visual and performative elements where relevant, such as layout, imagery, and symbolic gesture. These were not treated as separate from language but as part of the semiotic system through which parties frame authority, identity, and belonging (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2010). This is a selective integration (not a full multimodal analysis), consistent with DHA's emphasis on context, interdiscursivity, and triangulation.

Following Bourdieu and Foucault, the analysis assumes that texts allocate value (linguistic capital) and (re)shape power relations while remaining open to resistance (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1975, 1978). Because communities are not directly studied, findings address how legitimacy and capital are discursively organised within party-political discourse rather than behavioural outcomes at the level of everyday practice.

[18] See Chapter 5.

[19] *Topoi* (plural of topos) are standard argumentative themes that link a problem to a conclusion. "Topoi are socially conventionalized and recur habitually. They are not always expressed explicitly but can be made explicit as conditional or causal paraphrases, such as 'if x, then y' or 'y, because x'"(Wodak & Reisigl, 2001/2016, p.35).

3.4 Procedures of Analysis

All texts were imported into NVivo and tagged with metadata (party, genre, scale, date, language). The typical unit of analysis was a sentence or short passage; longer stretches were accompanied by brief analytic memos to preserve argumentative flow. Analysis moved from textual features (lexical choice, quantification, intensifiers/hedges, etc.) to discursive strategies (nomination/predication, which topoi are invoked, how stance is positioned) and then to the language ideologies and broader political logics indexed (Fairclough, 1989). Triangulation was used to compare patterns across genres (manifestos, parliamentary debate, media) and scales (state-wide/regional). For example, repeated referrals to cost in Senate interventions and right-wing media were tagged at the micro level (word choice + quantification), coded at the under topoi of efficiency and burden, and read at the macro level as a technocratic framing that narrows multilingualism to budgetary management, legitimating centralising constraints.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the design, corpus, and analytical approach used to investigate how Spain's minoritised languages are politicised in contemporary discourse. By combining DHA with a comparative and historically situated case-study design, the study offers a framework for examining how language ideologies are constructed and contested across scales. The following empirical chapters apply this approach to state-wide, institutional, and regional contexts, beginning with analysis of the manifestos of the 2023 Spanish general election.

4. Spain-Wide Political Discourse I: July 23 2023

4.1 Introduction

On 23 July 2023 (23J), Spain elected the 350-member Congreso de los Diputados [Congress of Deputies[20]] and 208 of the Senate's 266 seats. The Partido Popular (PP) won the most MPs (137) but, even with VOX (33), fell short of the 176 required for an absolute majority. A government was instead formed by the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, 121) with Sumar (31) and several nationalist and regionalist parties after investiture negotiations. [21] The campaign and its aftermath sharpened attention to multilingualism and reshaped how it circulated in political debate, as co-official languages were resignified and mobilised across genres of discourse.

The following chapter examines the manifestos of these four major state-wide parties (SWPs). It argues that manifesto discourse not only reflects policy preferences but reproduces, contests, and reorders the symbolic hierarchies that define the Spanish linguistic marketplace (RQ3). These specific parties have been chosen because they compete for the same national electorate and wield the most influence over state-level language policy via government formation and opposition agenda-setting. Read together, they establish a state-wide baseline against which later institutional and regional chapters can be compared to trace differences in framing, emphasis, and the allocation of linguistic value across the Spanish state (RQ2). While manifestos are the primary focus of this chapter, selected campaign slogans and materials are also examined where relevant to the discursive patterns under analysis. Across the material studied four overlapping positions emerge: The PSOE pairs inclusive rhetoric with a technocratic recentring of Castilian, the PP naturalises Castilian as neutral and universal while pushing other languages to the administrative margins, Sumar frames linguistic justice as structural redistribution that challenges Castilian's monopoly, and VOX advances monoglot nationalism that casts multilingualism as a threat to national unity (RQ1). Sub-state nationalist parties (SSNPs) are not considered here since their positions are

[20] UK equivalent to 'diputado' would be MP.
[21] Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, People's Party, Unite, VOX.

constitutively territorialised. They are instead analysed in the regional chapters alongside relevant institutional histories and sociolinguistic landscapes.[22]

Section 4.2 begins with analysis of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español's 23J programme.

4.2 Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)

Founded in 1879, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) is Spain's main centre-left, social democratic party, and one of its most electorally successful, having governed for much of the post-Franco democratic period (Kennedy, 2013). Traditionally committed to modernisation and progressive reform, the party has in recent years navigated a fragmented party system, governing in coalition with the further-left group Sumar since the 2023 general elections (Riera and Garmendia, 2024).

As one of the principal architects of the 1978 constitutional settlement the PSOE played a central role in institutionalising co-officiality, while simultaneously safeguarding the symbolic centrality of Castilian through the language of Article 3[23]. Until recently, this dual commitment- to both linguistic recognition and the unity of the nation through Castilian- has informed both national campaigns, where language issues have typically been avoided, and regional campaigns, where party branches (e.g. PSC, PSdeG, PSE, etc.) have more actively defended their region's co-official language (Berché, 2009). Although, this may reflect the PSOE's need, in certain regional contexts, to secure alliances with strong sub-state nationalist or regionalist parties (e.g., the present coalition with the PNV[24] in the Basque Country, the Montilla government in Catalonia from 2006 to 2010, and the Galician *bipartito*[25] between 2005 and 2009), particularly when governing in minority at the central level, so that reciprocal support across tiers is possible (Falcó-Gimeno & Verge, 2013). In such cases,

[22] However, Chapter 5 will include analysis of their interventions in both houses of parliament. This will enable analysis of how these groups represent and negotiate their communities to influence or contest language policy within Spain's hierarchical linguistic order.

[23] See introductory discussion on Article 3 of the 1978 Spanish constitution.
[24] Partido Nacionalista Vasco [Basque Nationalist Party]
[25] Bipartite- so named as it brought together two political formations (The Socialist party of Galicia and the Galician Nationalist Block).

defending co-official languages at the regional level may become not only consistent with ideological positioning but also a strategic instrument within a broader multi-level vote-exchange dynamic.

Historically parties of the left, such as the PSOE, advocated a shift away from minoritised languages- viewed as symbols of low status- and towards Castilian, which was seen as more economically and culturally advantageous within a linguistically stratified Spanish society (Wells, 2011, pp. 129-132). While, this stance is no longer dominant within the party, in multilingual democracies measures aimed at achieving widespread equality can nonetheless reinforce standardising and homogenising ideologies towards linguistic minorities (Blackledge 2000, p. 28).

Taking a contemporary turn, since 2018 PSOE governments under Pedro Sánchez, have moved between technocratic strategies that recast multilingualism as a question of economy rather than culture or rights, and, more recently, symbolic affirmations of Spain's linguistic diversity. An example of the PSOE's seeming shift, if not in ideology, then in policy, is their change in stance on the question of co-official language use in parliament, which they opposed in 2022, before supporting and actively legislating for following the 2023 general elections, in an attempt to ensure nationalist support (Congreso de los Diputados, 2022, 2023b). This example, which will be further discussed in chapter 5 demonstrates the reality of coalition politics forcing the PSOE to rhetorically, and to an extent materially, accommodate substate nationalist parties.

This political reality fuelled a series of attacks in the 23J campaign, which unfolded within an intensely polarised discursive landscape, where language became entangled with wider ideological battles over legitimacy, identity, and the integrity of the Spanish state. One example was the slogan "Que te vote Txapote" (Let Txapote vote for you)[26] aimed at Sánchez and the PSOE. Originating in 2022 and resurfacing in the May 2023 municipal and regional elections amid controversy over EH Bildu's inclusion of former ETA[27] convicts on its lists, the slogan invoked Francisco Javier García Gaztelu ("Txapote"), an imprisoned

[26] Translation from: Wilkinson, I. (2023, July 12). Spanish PM struggles to shrug off slogan that links him to Eta. *The Times*. https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/spanish-pm-struggles-to-shrug-off-slogan-that-links-him-to-eta-6ql55rhwj

[27] EH Bildu is a left-wing Basque separatist party, and ETA was Basque terrorist organisation (associated with the Basque left) who sought independence for the Basque Country (see Chapter 8).

former ETA member (Madariaga & Riera, 2023; Quelart, 2023).This strategic use of the ETA militant's name functioned as an indexical shorthand (see Silverstein, 1996), an implicit and coded reference, by which any political agreement or dialogue involving Basque nationalism was delegitimised. Attempts such as this to tie Sánchez to criminality (be it to Txapote or to Catalan separatist leaders) served as discursive anchors for a broader narrative that framed a future PSOE led government as a hostage to separatist forces, with language rights, amnesty proposals, and acts of symbolic recognition portrayed as the price of his political survival (Vall-Prat & Rodon, 2024). This represented one way (others will be discussed in section 4.4) in which the right, and specifically the far-right cast multilingualism as a threat, and as a precursor to national disintegration, throughout the campaign. While this slogan was an example of how other parties portrayed the PSOE's position, the socialists' own messaging through the campaign does not specifically address these framings. For the clearest sense of the PSOE's position of language at this time we must turn to their manifesto.

The PSOE manifesto lays out a vision of language policy that is formally inclusive but materially asymmetrical. It does this by recentring Castilian as the default linguistic infrastructure of the nation and its larger linguistic market, while also categorising co-official languages as economic assets, but of a lower order. Through nomination strategies, the text evokes linguistic diversity using recurring plural formulations, "nuestras lenguas oficiales, [our official languages]" "las lenguas cooficiales" [the co-official languages], that suggest pluralism while avoiding specificity, functioning so that Catalan, Basque, and Galician (or the other co-official languages) are never explicitly named (PSOE, 2023: 54-55, 57-58). This abstraction allows for a level symbolic inclusion, while also acting as a homogenising tool, downplaying the historical, social, and political realities that differentiate Spain's minoritised languages, casting them as a singular and unidentified Other. By contrast there are repeated explicit references to the Spanish language both as *castellano* and *español* (e.g. PSOE, 2023, pp. 57, 122). By naming Castilian, where the co-official languages were not named, the text reaffirms its position as the unmarked centre of linguistic value (Del Valle, 2007).

As touched on above, predication strategies in the manifesto assign languages a set of primarily economic and technocratic attributes. They are framed as "recursos de enorme valor y potencial," [resources of enormous value and potential] and as keys to "competitividad internacional." [international competitiveness] (PSOE, 2023, pp. 58, 55). While these evaluations are extended in principle to all official languages, in practice they are

applied with greatest specificity and frequency to Castilian. Co-official languages remain grammatically and semantically subordinated, being named collectively and situated in secondary positions to Castilian. Through the text the PSOE thus reproduces a hierarchical multilingualism, exemplifying the unequal distribution of linguistic capital, where symbolic and economic legitimacy solidify primarily around Spanish (Bourdieu, 1991/2009; Mar-Molinero, 2000, p. 90).

Throughout the text discourse is sustained through several overlapping argumentation topoi, the most notable being those of utility (languages as drivers of innovation and economic growth), responsibility (the state must "cuidar," [care for] "potenciar," [empower] and "aprovechar" [take advantage of] its linguistic resources), and modernisation (linguistic development as part of a broader digital and infrastructural transformation) (PSOE, 2023, p. 58). These topoi draw on ostensibly neutral goals such as economic recovery and competitiveness but in doing so they reframe linguistic diversity in terms of economic yield not in terms of cultural or political significance. The resulting discourse is not hostile to multilingualism but channels it through a narrow framework of technocratic pragmatism, in which diversity is tolerated insofar as it can be managed, quantified, and capitalised (Heller and Duchêne 2012). This discursive repositioning of language constitutes an indexical reordering, where co-official languages are reimagined as instruments of economic modernisation and digital integration, rather than as socially embedded, historically situated practices, and distances the PSOE from accusations of separatist support advanced by opposition parties (Brennan & Wilson, 2016).

Throughout the manifesto the state emerges as the central agent, as seen through the use of active verbs such as *garantizar* [guarantee] and *impulsar* [push forward] (e.g. PSOE 2023, pp. 74, 107). Verbs such as "cuidar" and "potenciar" (referenced above) can be read to have certain paternalistic connotations which not only cast central (monolingual) government as the primary source of agency and authority regarding language but also suggest the co-official languages to be weak and in need of the care of the Spanish state to survive. Citizens and language communities are largely absent as agents in the text and almost entirely erased as subjects of linguistic practice. While institutions such as the RAE, which has historically been associated with ideologies of standardisation and linguistic purism, appear not as ideological authorities but as independent actors (Spolsky, 2004, p. 22; Moreno Cabrera, 2008, pp. 93-95). While seemingly an attempt to eliminate the political significance of

language, the omission of identity, history, and speaker agency is itself ideological (Nicholls, 2006).

In sum, while the PSOE's 23J manifesto formally embraces Spain's multilingual reality, it does so through a discourse that recentres Castilian both symbolically and economically. Co-official languages are recognised but subordinated; included, but only within terms that do not challenge the primacy of Castilian as the dominant linguistic and institutional norm. This is not simply a matter of omission but of ideological reproduction. In other words, symbolic domination often functions not through explicit exclusion, but through the naturalisation of existing hierarchies, a process that aligns with Bourdieu's notion of misrecognition (Bourdieu, 1972/2010). As such, the PSOE's discourse, despite its pluralist surface, ultimately reaffirms the structure of linguistic inequality it appears to transcend.

4.3 PP

The Partido Popular (PP) is the successor to Manuel Fraga's Alianza Popular [People's Alliance], itself born out of reformers coming out of the Franco regime (Maestu Fonseca, 2020). The Partido Popular's engagement with Spain's co-official languages has therefore been shaped by a long-standing ideological tension between constitutional recognition and Castilian primacy, manifesting in a discourse that has historically favoured a monolingual centre over pluralist accommodation, especially at the state level (Wells, 2013, p. 136). While formally accepting the co-official status of Catalan, Basque, and Galician as enshrined in the 1978 Constitution, the party's discourse has repeatedly foregrounded Castilian as the unmarked, universal medium of the Spanish nation, constructing other languages as administratively peripheral or regionally bounded. Or, in the terminology of Woolard (2016), the PP's discourse frames Castilian as anonymous- and therefore neutral and universal, whereas co-official languages are portrayed within a framework of authenticity- symbolic of local identity but ill-suited to national or official domains.

This is visible not only in legislative interventions such as the 2013 LOMCE (Manent Alonso & Guardia Hernández 2016, p. 244; BOE 2013), which reasserted Castilian's vehicular status

in education across Spain, but also in symbolic acts, including appeals to the Constitutional Court, to contest immersion models in Catalan education or minimum language quota laws in Galicia and the Balearic Islands (C. Bianculli et al., 2018, p. 89). These legal moves are underpinned by a broader discursive strategy that draws on the topoi of neutrality, cohesion, and liberalism. However, it should be taken into consideration that apparent neutrality in the realm of language policy can often mask ideological biases and asymmetrical outcomes (Wee, 2010). In practice such 'neutrality' may serve to universalise the dominant group's interests, naturalise the status quo, and sustains inequality by withholding the institutional support minoritised languages would need to alter uneven conditions.

Like the PSOE, the PP's discursive approach has also evolved in relation to changing political contingencies. During periods of negotiation with substate nationalist parties, as in José María Aznar's first term in office (1996-2000) or during Feijóo's tenure as Galician president, the PP has demonstrated a degree of pragmatic flexibility. In Galicia, for instance, Feijóo's use of the term *bilingüismo cordial* [friendly bilingualism] (which will be further discussed in chapter 7) appeared to recognise the affective legitimacy of Galician, albeit within a narrowly defined framework that prioritised coexistence over empowerment (O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024, p. 242). While in 1996 Aznar is reported to have used Catalan while negotiating support for his investiture vote and was famously quoted at the time saying "el idioma catalán es una de las expresiones más bellas que existe, yo lo hablo en la intimidad" [The Catalan language is one of the most beautiful ways of expressing oneself there is, I speak it in private] (Nadi, 2023). At a national level, however, this rhetoric shifted after the PP won an absolute majority in 2000, and relations have declined substantially since. Indeed, the 2017 application of Article 155 in Catalonia, which temporarily suspended the region's autonomy, demonstrates a centralist reflex that remains ideologically dominant within the party, if not the state more broadly.

This shift reveals not inconsistency but a strategic modulation of language ideology depending on audience and scale, with the national platform privileging Castilian supremacy while regional branches may adopt more conciliatory tones, as indeed observed historically within the PSOE. In the PP's 23J manifesto, this can be seen in a conspicuous absence of references to the co-official languages, with the sole case of "la lengua cooficial correspondiente" [the corresponding co-official language] referring to the use of languages in bilingual education within select communities (PP, 2023, p. 49). This could be read in two

ways: either as a semiotic process of erasure by which inconvenient or ideologically incompatible aspects of sociolinguistic reality are rendered invisible (Irvine & Gal 2000/2003, pp. 38-39), or more simply as a reflection of the low position of the co-official languages on the party's list of priorities. This can also be argued from the position of this sole mention of these languages, the 151st pledge in the manifesto, and positioned after a pledge on the role of foreign language education.

By positioning these pledges side by side, it can be argued that there is an equation (and thus a further erasure of cultural significance of) foreign language learning, and co-official language education. Furthermore, while co-official languages are addressed through a bureaucratic vocabulary of balance, foreign languages are framed aspirationally. The PP promises to ensure that young people can "competir con los de todo el mundo." [compete with those from all over the world] through foreign language bilingual education. This juxtaposition is ideologically loaded, suggesting that linguistic diversity is more desirable when it is foreign. Whereas domestic multilingualism must be managed and constrained; international multilingualism is an asset to be cultivated. The text thus presents a reordered view of the country's linguistic hierarchy, in which foreign languages possess more potential social, symbolic, and therefore economic capital within the marketplace of the Spanish-state, and indeed the world more generally.

While there is scarce mention of Spain's other languages, Castilian is repeatedly and invoked- "la lengua española," [the Spanish language] "el español," "un patrimonio que compartimos más de 500 millones de personas" [a heritage shared by more than 500 million people] (e.g. PP, 2023, pp. 104, 20, 94)- and framed as both a national common denominator and a global asset. It is tied to the Instituto Cervantes, to the international prestige of Spanish-speaking countries, and to Spain's position in economic and diplomatic domains (Del Valle, 2008, 2014). The message is clear, Castilian (specifically Iberian Spanish) is the language through which Spain speaks to itself and to the world. This discursive privileging is reinforced through argumentation strategies that draw on the topoi of heritage, national cohesion, and global competitiveness. The manifesto asserts that Castilian serves to "edificar sólidos vínculos políticos, culturales, económicos y sociales" [to build solid political, cultural, economic, and social ties] (PP, 2023, p. 94), a claim that serves to collapse language and nation into a single project.

Ultimately, the Partido Popular's approach to language reflects a clear ideological hierarchy in which Castilian occupies a privileged, unmarked position, while co-official languages are marginalised. Their manifesto makes minimal reference to linguistic diversity, contrasting sharply with the aspirational framing of foreign languages. Even when regional branches adopt more conciliatory tones, the overarching discourse remains centralist, positioning Castilian as both a national glue and a global asset and reducing Spain's internal multilingualism to a secondary or even tertiary concern.

4.4 VOX

VOX is a populist radical right-wing party, founded in 2013 by former members of the Partido Popular. In line with Mudde's (2007) definition of populist radical right parties (PRRPs), VOX's ideology brings together strands of nativism, authoritarianism and populism, framing 'the people' as a culturally homogenous community threatened by external and internal 'others', presenting itself as the sole authentic representative of the nation (Morales-Gálvez & Cetrà, 2022). The party capitalised on the political aftermath of the 2017 Catalan independence crisis, reframing the Spanish political arena as a struggle between a moral and unified Spain, and a coalition of separatists, progressives, and globalist elites (Ribera Payá & Martínez, 2021).

In contrast to the other major SWPs, VOX's position on Spain's co-official languages is rooted in a wider discourse of national homogenisation and exclusionary nationalism that not only challenges the decentralising consensus of the 1978 constitutional settlement but seeks to reassert a univocal conception of the nation-state (Gould, 2019, p. 19). From early interventions opposing Catalan immersion in schools and parliamentary proposals aimed at limiting the use of co-official languages in public administration and education, to the equation of language revitalisation with regional nationalisms, the party has constructed a narrative of multilingualism not as a shared constitutional value but as a threat to civic unity and territorial integrity (Pajares 2023, p. 11). These interventions form part of a broader ideological alignment with other far right forces, where language (and more broadly cultural) policy becomes a key site for contesting both external influence and internal pluralism (Wodak 2021, pp. 75-76; Rama et al., 2021, p. 96).

Unlike the other political formations discussed in this chapter, VOX presents a unique case, in that it actively seeks to recode linguistic diversity as illegitimate. Throughout their manifesto, VOX's treatment of language emerges not simply as nationalist conservatism, but as a deliberate and ideologically coherent programme of symbolic unmaking: of rights, of recognition, and of the democratic vision built into the 1978 constitutional settlement.

As in other manifestos, co-official languages are not specifically named; when references to them do appear, as "distintas lenguas" [different languages] or "lenguas regionales" [regional languages] it is in negative constructions, or where they are framed as the tools of separatists (VOX, 2023, pp. 9, 57). As such, VOX casts Catalan, Basque, and Galician not as linguistic systems but as stand-ins for separatism, disorder, and moral decline. Castilian, by contrast, is presented not just as a language of the state, but as the language through which statehood is imagined. In this way language policy and discourse become a site through which VOX performs its broader ideological rejection of decentralisation, minority rights, and multicultural democracy.

While VOX shows a degree of ideological enmity to all non-Spanish languages, it is clear from both the manifesto's text, and rhetoric from prominent members, they show special venom to members of SSNPs in Catalonia (who they refer to as "golpistas" [coup-plotters]) which would explain their specific issues with the Catalan (VOX, 2023, p. 15).

VOX uses a topos of threat to justify their polarising use of language. Across the text, the party enacts what Wodak (2015) has coined as victim-perpetrator reversal, recasting Castilian speakers as the new victims of an oppressive "apartheid lingüístico" [linguistic apartheid] and positioning language rights not as protections for minoritised communities but as mechanisms of exclusion against the national majority (VOX, 2023, pp. 9, 126). The use of the word apartheid is particularly incendiary, reducing a complex system of multilingual governance to a binary moral frame, foreclosing discussion by invoking the language of racial injustice. In this schema, language rights for Galician, Catalan or Basque speakers are not protective nor democratic, but discriminatory. It is this reorganisation of the discursive field, rather than any specific policy proposal, that defines VOX's language ideology: a semiotic 'purification' of the nation, in which one language, one state, and one people are rendered mutually constitutive (Rius-Ulldemolins et al., 2025).

Fig. 1-4: VOX campaign advert on Calle Alcalá in the centre of Madrid.

An extension of these strategies can be seen in the above image from the campaign, of a VOX advert in the centre of Madrid. In the centre of the image a hand bearing a Spanish flag bracelet makes a downward gesture, discarding the Catalan Estelada, alongside LGBTQ+, feminist, and anarchist symbols, into a wastebin. The imperative "DECIDE LO QUE IMPORTA" [decide what matters] reframes this act of disposal not as an attack, but as an ethical choice, an appeal to patriotic discernment that masks exclusion through the language of value. Inherent in this statement is an assertion that the causes and peoples represented by these symbols do *not* matter. Here the exclusionary ideology is realised multimodally with the verbal imperative and visual composition working together to frame the act of disposal as a patriotic duty (Kress, 2010). Furthermore, the fact that the hand dropping the Catalan flag, is itself wearing a Spanish one acts as a visual representation of linguistic hierarchy in Spain. Beyond this, the image activates a logic of equivalence that recodes regional (and one also assumes linguistic) identity, as represented by the Estelada, as part of a broader semiotic regime of moral decay and disorder. The visual act of disposal performs what the manifesto implies, using aesthetic violence to reassert symbolic control over linguistic and cultural minorities, and encoding homogenisation as a patriotic duty. Moreover, the gesture of

disposal erases distinctions between these minorities, casting them all as equally un-Spanish, and therefore disposable. In other words, the image collapses divergent forms of non-normative expression- linguistic, sexual, political- into a singular, negatively defined 'Other' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 127-128). This semiotic compression serves to reinforce a nationalist ideology which is both morally binary and visually reductive. This being said, by embedding these ideologies in a such a striking and emotionally charged visual, the advert circumvents rational debate, instead mobilising affective resonance to naturalise exclusionary hierarchies.

What ultimately emerges through VOX's campaign material is a language policy discourse rooted not in governance but in exclusionary narration. It is not that VOX denies the existence of other languages, it recasts them as signs of "falsas identidades" [fake identities], tools of manipulation, and symptoms of democratic deterioration (VOX, 2023, 9). This is the real force of their discourse: not its explicit policy proposals (which are thin), but its reorganisation of the ideological field. Through a mixture of textual erasure, visual spectacle, and populist affect, VOX redraws the symbolic boundaries of linguistic belonging, attempting to govern who may speak, in which language, and with what legitimacy.

4.5 Sumar

While only formally constituted in 2022, Sumar represents a consolidation of political currents that have long characterised Spain's progressive plurinational left. Drawing on the legacies of Izquierda Unida, Unidas Podemos[28], and a constellation of small post-15M[29] leftist platforms, Sumar's ideology can best be described as a post-sovereign view of plurinationalism, in which the state must actively accommodate multiple cultural and linguistic identities without reducing them to localised exceptions (Keating, 2004). In the context of language, this translates to viewing linguistic diversity not as a concession to

[28] Podemos [We Can] is a left-wing, anti-austerity party, since 2023 Sumar [Unite] has sought to unify the left. Podemos ran under the banner of Sumar in 2023, but relations later fractured over leadership and candidacies.
[29] 15M (the *Indignados* movement) was a wave of protests that began on 15 May 2011. It was a landmark in Spanish participatory politics, from which several parties/platforms emerged.

regional autonomy, but as a constitutive feature of a modern democratic Spanish state. That Sumar, as opposed to the more centrist PSOE, has consistently voted for an expansion of linguistic rights in congress (pre- and post-23J), suggests that this is a matter of principle for the formation, rather than political expediency (Congreso de los Diputados, 2022, 2023b). It is from this ideological ground that Sumar's 2023 manifesto articulates its proposals.

At the level of nomination and predication, the manifesto establishes a tone of inclusivity and cultural legitimacy. Co-official languages are referred to as "lenguas oficiales del Estado" [official languages of the state] (pp. 156, 171, 173) suggesting equal legitimacy to Castilian, "lenguas históricas" [historic languages] (p.171) acknowledging the historic and cultural roots of these languages, and "idioma propio" [own (native) language] (p. 128) echoing the language of *lengua propia* (discussed more in Chapter 6) the statutes of autonomy of the regions under study, which was chosen in place of more established terms such as 'national language' which could be seen as constitutionally problematic (Woolard, 2016, p. 43). The document also includes the term "lenguas minorizadas" [minoritised languages], which is the sole use of this term across all parties, showing an awareness of power dynamics and agency between Castilian and Spain's other languages (Sumar, 2023, p. 156). Furthermore, the text refers to "aquellas no reconocidas como lenguas oficiales," [those not recognised as official languages] (p. 171) explicitly extending its scope to languages such as Asturleonese and Aragonese which, even within their own communities, face an uphill struggle for legitimacy. Inclusive discursive choices such as these mark a departure not only from the symbolic erasure seen in the PP's discourse but also from the selective treatment of linguistic diversity from the PSOE. Finally, the phrase "pluralidad lingüística como patrimonio cultural común" [linguistic plurality as common cultural heritage] not only makes reference to Article 3.3 of the Spanish constitution[30] and reframes it as a foundation for redistributive institutional action, and not, as it has, to an extent become, an empty political signpost of broader ideological persuasion.

Sumar's arguments on language are built around a topos of linguistic justice. As such, the party seeks to avoid unequal linguistic power relations, by aiming for parity, rather than equality, through a structural rebalancing of resource and capital (van Parijs, 2011). This is most explicit in the proposals for a 'Ley de Lenguas' and a plurilingual education law, both

[30] "La riqueza de las distintas modalidades lingüísticas de España es un patrimonio cultural que será objeto de especial respeto y protección." (BOE, 1978: 3)

policy moves that reflect a strong modality of obligation: institutions “deberán dedicar un porcentaje de sus ingresos a la adquisición de títulos en lenguas oficiales del Estado,” [must dedicate a percentage of their income to the acquision of qualifications in the official languages of the state] (Sumar, 2023, p. 173) and “deben preserver la riqueza cultural y lingüística de España.” [they must preserve the cultural and linguistic richness of Spain] (p. 121). These high-modality constructions contrast with the often times weaker formulations in PSOE discourse discussed in section 4.2.

The vision of the state presented here is also markedly different. Rather than acting as a neutral arbiter of linguistic claims, the state is discursively constructed as a proactive plurilingual agent. This vision challenges the dominant habitus by seeking to redistribute linguistic capital away from Castilian’s monopoly, reframing minoritised languages as equally legitimate currencies in the national marketplace. The manifesto’s call for a reformulation of the Instituto Cervantes to reflect the linguistic reality of Spain is emblematic of this shift (p. 171). Where the PP envisions the Cervantes Institute as a vehicle for Spanish global prestige, Sumar proposes a decentralised cultural diplomacy that includes minoritised languages in its international mission. This would be a radical departure from precedent: the Instituto Cervantes has historically operated as a Castilian-only organisation, and legal (and indeed political) obstacles have limited recognition of the co-official languages outwith the borders of their respective autonomous communities (Mar-Molinero, 1995, p. 337; Paffey & Mar-Molinero, 2009; Villa & Del Valle, 2015). In this context, the proposal does more than extend representation, rather it challenges the ideological basis of statehood as Castilian-centric.

As one may expect from left-of-centre discourse, the state remains the primary agent of change. Verbs are overwhelmingly active and institutional “impulsaremos,” [we will push] (e.g. p. 171) “promoveremos,” [we will promote] (e.g. p. 172) “pondremos en marcha” [we will set in motion] (p. 158) which can perhaps be read as a centralisation of agency, contradicting the manifesto’s broader democratic ethos, and thus revealing an unresolved tension between institutional redistribution and participatory governance.

As a whole, through inclusive nomination strategies, a modality of obligation that frames language rights as non-negotiable, and a reimagining of the state as a plurilingual actor, Sumar’s manifesto advances a vision of linguistic justice grounded in the redistribution of linguistic capital and opportunity rather than recognition alone. Unlike the two larger parties,

for Sumar, languages are not merely tolerated within a Castilian-centred framework but are presented as co-constitutive of the state's democratic legitimacy. This separates Sumar from not only the other SWPs but also from substate nationalist groups, as it seeks to universalise linguistic parity, not as a reactive defence of regional specificity, but as a normative democratic good.

4.6 Conclusion

The 23J manifestos present four distinct ways of narrating Spain's multilingual order. The PSOE formalises inclusion while recentring Castilian through technocratic valuation that positions other official languages as secondary assets. The PP sustains Castilian's unmarked status by omission while elevating Spanish as a national unifier and a global resource. Sumar frames linguistic justice as structural redistribution, articulating high-obligation proposals that seek to rebalance institutional duty and expand the circle of legitimate competence. VOX advances a monoglot nationalism that recodes recognition as threat, using textual erasure and charged imagery to redraw the boundaries of linguistic belonging (RQ1).

In all cases, these manifesto discourses do more than describe policy, they reproduce or resist the ideological conditions that make possible certain linguistic realities. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and misrecognition highlight how symbolic power is exercised and contested: dominant languages accrue legitimacy by appearing neutral, while minoritised ones are marked, territorially bounded, and commodified. What differs is whether parties work to preserve, transform, or dismantle this hierarchy. (RQ3)

The next chapter turns now from campaign discourse and towards institutional contexts. This will enable an examination of how discourse is sustained, adapted, or challenged once removed from the crucible of an election campaign.

5. State-wide Discourse II. Co-official Languages in Institutional Discourse: Congress, the Senate, and Beyond

5.1 Introduction

This chapter moves from the campaign discourse studied in Chapter 4 to look at institutional practice in three different contexts. These are: the debate on the September 2023 reform in the Congreso de los Diputados [Congress of Deputies][31] authorising the use of co-official languages in plenary sessions, the June 2025 Senate debate in which a Partido Popular majority declined to extend similar measures, and the events surrounding Spain's request for EU official status for Catalan, Galician and Basque (2023-2025). Across these contexts, linguistic recognition is treated as a proxy for broader ideological alignments. Depending both on the political affiliation of the speaker and the site where discourse occurs, accommodation of the co-official languages is cast, variously, as capitulation, excess, or democratic redress. Linking back to the research questions this chapter speaks to RQ1 (how parties discursively construct the co-official languages) and to RQ3 (what this reveals about the reproduction or contestation of hierarchy and symbolic power) while laying groundwork for RQ2, which the regional chapters develop. Section 5.2 begins this analysis, focusing on Congress.

5.2 Co-official Languages in the Spanish Parliament

Following the 2023 snap general elections, the Partido Popular emerged with more seats (137) than the PSOE (121) in the lower house, yet both the left- and right-wing blocs fell

[31] As previously stated, 'diputado' being equivalent to MP, and the Congreso de los Diputados being broadly equivalent to the UK House of Commons.

short of securing the absolute or simple majority required for investiture (RTVE, 2023). This tight electoral arithmetic elevated Junts per Catalunya, a Catalan separatist party, to the position of kingmaker.[32] Despite Junts being a successor to the centre-right Convergència i Unió [Convergence and Union], which bargained with the PP in the mid-90s, their recent enmity with the party (see Chapter 6) meant a PSOE-led government was more plausible in practice (Field, 2021, p. 552; Gunzelmann, 2024, pp. 87-88). Junts conditioned support for Sánchez's investiture on an amnesty for those prosecuted over the 2017 Catalan independence referendum, financing negotiations, and expanded institutional recognition for the State's co-official languages. (Vall-Prat & Rodon, 2024, p. 1430).

In line with these conditions, on 17 August 2023, Spain's foreign minister, José Manuel Albares (PSOE), formally wrote to the EU Council requesting the inclusion of Catalan, Basque, and Galician as official EU languages. Shortly after, the Congress authorised the use of co-official languages in plenary sessions. In a reversal of their earlier opposition to the move, the PSOE voted with left-wing, regionalist, and sub-state nationalist parties to approve the reform as part of the agreement that secured Francina Armengol's investiture as speaker (Congreso de los Diputados, 2022, 2023b).

Media commentary across the political spectrum interpreted the change as a "guiño a los independentistas" [wink to the independence supporting parties], with opposition parties casting it as a capitulation to separatists (Chouza, 2023; Gallego & Esteban, 2023; Miguel, 2023). Broadly speaking, the centre-left press tended to welcome the reform, describing it as a "paso histórico" [historic step] (Hermida, 2023) and a "demostración de la diversidad lingüística de España" [demonstration of Spain's linguistic diversity] (Hinojosa, 2023). By contrast, right-wing media emphasised costs, for which they personally blamed Armengol, shifting the debate from linguistic rights to managerial competence and budgetary discipline (Casillas Bayo, 2025; Esteban & Macías, 2023). In addition, Congress was compared to the tower of Babel, casting multilingualism as chaos and delegitimising it as impractical (Escudero, 2023). These competing framings show that the reform not only institutionalised the co-official languages but also recoded them as political tokens indexing broader ideological alignments, illustrating how the value of a given language is produced relationally within the linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu, 1991/2009).

[32] Other SSNPs were already giving support to Sánchez and the PSOE.

While the *act* of legislating this change itself exemplifies the political instrumentalisation of minoritised languages, the debate preceding this change offers its own insights. While manifesto patterns resurface, the explicit focus of the debate on language means that underlying ideologies were stated more openly, foregrounding questions of identity, legitimacy, and making visible the symbolic hierarchy of Spain's multilingual order.

5.2.1 The Right-Wing

Right-wing interventions in the chamber portrayed the measure as rewarding secessionism and undermining state authority.

VOX used three key strategies to build their argument. First, by listing policy areas that could have been debated instead (e.g. the economy, education), the speaker contrasts bread-and-butter concerns with the symbolic reform under consideration (Congreso de los Diputados, 2023a, p. 4). This constructs a hierarchy of importance that presents language policy as an issue of low priority and, by extension, questions the legitimacy of debating language rights.

Second, consistent with its manifesto, VOX employs a topos of threat to portray the move as a PSOE concession to "aquellos que quieren romper nuestra unidad y nuestra convivencia" [those who want to shatter our unity and our coexistence[33]] (p. 5). Beyond attacking Sánchez, this rhetoric serves to equate expanded language rights with division and discord, while also repositioning the co-official languages as the exclusive property of the SSNPs. The parliamentary setting facilitates this, as with politicians debating language in a political arena, the languages themselves are treated as partisan objects.

Third, derisive humour was used to trivialise linguistic inequalities, such as an MP's account of being barred from using Aragonese at school, contrasting it with "real" hardships (p. 5). The word "represión" in particular is seized upon here and presented as hyperbolic. This together with the phrase "usted se queja amargamente" [you complain bitterly] presents minority experience as self-indulgent complaining. The adverb 'bitterly*'* connotes resentment

[33] A note on 'convivencia'. A frequent term in Spanish political discourse, it refers to language used in the 1978 constitution (preamble and Article 27) and refers to an idea of peaceful coexistence and 'living together'.

and grievance, recoding experience-based testimony as affective excess, downgrading its credibility and relevance to the legislative agenda. Finally, the sarcastic offer of "un abrazo" [a hug] infantilises the MP in question, suggesting their concern to be childlike and unsuited to parliamentary debate.

Together these three strategies invalidate concerns about linguistic inequality and frame calls for co-official language rights as partisan pretexts.

The Partido Popular's discourse, while less overtly combative, was similarly structured around delegitimisation, as well as a defence of Castilian as the unmarked *lengua común* [common (shared) language]. The reform was cast as a cynical manoeuvre tailored to "las necesidades de Pedro Sánchez" [the needs of Pedro Sánchez] (p. 6). Echoing the media narrative discussed above, this ties the extension of linguistic rights to political deal-making, highlighting minoritised languages as instruments of partisan bargaining rather than cultural identity markers. Furthermore, although never named, Carles Puigdemont[34] is alluded to, through the metonym of "Waterloo" (the Belgian town where he lives in exile, as the real reason for the change. By tying the reform to Puigdemont, the PP erases the PSOE's agency and reframes a domestic parliamentary measure as externally imposed by a 'fugitive' who epitomises the secessionist threat. Thus, the PP positions language reform as evidence that Spanish sovereignty is being undermined.

Equally important is the PP's strategic nomination of Castilian as the *lengua común* (pp. 6-8). This intertextual term, well-established in institutional and media discourse, naturalises Castilian as the constitutive language of the nation-state and, subsequently, of the wider pan-Hispanic community (Amorós Negre & Baez Damiano, 2024). The speaker draws on this idea by presenting Castilian not as one language among others, but as the neutral, self-evident vehicle of parliamentary communication (p. 7). This corresponds to an ideology of anonymity, which presents the dominant language as unmarked and therefore universally appropriate (Gal & Woolard, 2001/2014; Woolard, 2016). Moreover, by labelling Castilian as *común*, co-official languages appear as both divisive and ill-suited to the national stage by contrast.

[34] The Catalan President who organised the 2017 referendum, who at the time of writing still lives in exile in Belgium.

Overall, the PP and VOX use the debate to position multilingualism as a transactional concession that fractures *convivencia*. In contrast to this section 5.2.2 goes on to examine the response of the left.

5.2.2 The Left-Wing

Interventions from the left constructed co-official languages not as threats to national unity but as resources of democratic inclusion and historical continuity.

The PSOE speaker strategically alternates between Catalan and Castilian, a performative choice that itself embodies the ideal of bilingual harmony being advanced and indexes an inclusive stance toward both codes (see Auer, 1998; Rampton, 1998, *inter alia*). Moreover, by nominating congress as "la casa de la palabra" [the home of the spoken word] the PSOE presents the chamber as a site of recognition, foregrounding the importance of including authentic voices from around the country (Congreso de los Diputados, 2023a, p.9). In this vein, the predication of languages (voiced in Catalan) as "una de les fortaleses de la nostra unió" [one of the strengths of our unity] simultaneously disputes right-wing portrayals of divisiveness and reindexes the co-official languages as symbols of unity, reclaiming Catalan specifically as a language of national cohesion. Finally, the reciprocal framing "tan española es la lengua catalana […] como catalana es la lengua castellana" [the Catalan language is as Spanish as the Spanish language is Catalan] rearticulates the two languages in a relation of co-ownership, undermining right-wing antagonistic framings while also limiting separatist partisan appropriation.

For their part, Sumar's speaker adopts a discourse explicitly rooted in pluralism and linguistic justice. Their intervention opens with greetings in multiple languages: "Bon dia. Bos días. Egun on. Buenos días" (p. 22), before switching to Valencian. This serves to emphasise the group's plurinational identity, positioning itself as a microcosm of Spain's diversity and as a corrective to homogenising nationalist projects at both state-wide and sub-state levels. Additionally, the speaker explicitly collectivises her voice, speaking for "totes les persones que han sigut discriminades*"* [all the people who have been discriminated against] (p. 23). In

doing so the speaker highlights a history of repression and activism, indexing linguistic diversity as both heritage and, later futurity, describing the Valencian as “una llengua amb futur” [a language with a future] (p. 23). This legitimises the reform not only as symbolic recognition but as a matter of justice and repair, positioning Sumar as a counterweight to competing nationalist ideologies.

While the left construct language as a shared resource, section 5.2.3 turns to sub-state nationalist readings that prioritise linguistic sovereignty.

5.2.3 Sub-State Nationalist Parties

On the whole, despite small differences noted below, SSNPs frame the reform as a historic act of redress and recognition. Testimonial narratives (EH Bildu, ERC, Junts) appeal to historic memories of linguistic repression, for example, ERC’s claim that Catalan survived only in “clandestinitat” [in secret] (Congreso de los Diputados, 2023a, p. 20). Several parties equate language with nationhood, for example Bildu: “Euskara, azken finean, Nafarroa delako eta Nafarroa, euskara” [Basque, after all, is Navarra and Navarra is Basque] (p. 17). Others, like Junts, tie linguistic survival explicitly to sovereignty: “només la independència garanteix la supervivència de la nostra llengua i de la nostra nació” [only independence guarantees the survival of our language and our nation] (p. 19). Together these discursive choices problematise the right’s narrative around the *lengua común,* contesting the hegemony of Castilian by situating Spain’s linguistic hierarchy as rooted in historic repression (Woolard, 1985). At the same time, however, by tying language to their own nationalist projects, these parties also reproduce the politicisation of language. While this may garner resources and solidarity in the short term, it may also undermine goals of language revitalisation and achieving broad-based revitalisation in the long-term, either by triggering political backlash, or by narrowing the speaker base by reinforcing the link between language choice and political position.

Other nationalist parties blend testimonial appeals with institutional and historical registers. The PNV anchors its intervention in legal pragmatism, seeking “balio juridikoa” [equal legal validity] (Congreso de los Diputados, 2023a, p. 3) for multilingual texts, recasting recognition as legal equality rather than a concession. The BNG situates Galician’s

marginalisation within “500 anos de imposición do español” [500 years of Spanish imposition] (p. 13), condemning the hierarchisation of a “lingua de primeira” [first-order language] and multiple “linguas de segunda,” [second-order languages], presenting inequality as a structural hierarchy reproduced over centuries, rather than a discrete episode.

Overall sub-state nationalist discourse in the debate contests the monolingual default of the Congreso de los Diputados, while also unsettling the idea that the Spanish Parliament is the singular locus of political sovereignty. From this it can be argued that it is not only the SWPs that politicise language for their own ends. The difference, however, is that while SWPs may politicise language to uphold the status quo or reinforce existing hierarchies, sub-state nationalists are using it to upend both current linguistic and political hierarchies at the heart of the Spanish state. These dynamics were later echoed in the Senate, where the issue re-emerged within a different institutional and political setting.

5.3 The June 2025 Senate Debate

The 11 June 2025 Senate debate revisited the tensions around institutional multilingualism in a more ideologically hostile context. A proposal tabled by nationalist and regionalist groups sought to normalise the use of co-official languages across Senate procedure, extending the limited accommodations introduced in 2010. By linking reform to the Senate’s role in representing the Autonomous Communities, proponents framed multilingualism as democratic rebalancing. The Partido Popular, however, wielding its absolute majority in the upper house, rejected it outright, framing it as disruptive and divisive. Given the dominance of the PP in this chamber, the following section focuses on their discourse in order to examine how both a shift in institutional setting and in relative power shape rhetorical strategies and the broader framing of linguistic legitimacy.

Comparing the language of the PP in Congress in 2023 and in the Senate in 2025, one can observe a shift in tone that correlates to the party’s relative power in each chamber. This is consistent with literature showing that mainstream opposition parties are more likely to

moderate their positions in comparison with parties in power (Maeda, 2016, p. 223).[35] In Congress (2023), the PP couched their opposition to reform in attacks against Sánchez and the PSOE, as well as in arguments of procedural common sense of using the *lengua común*. By June 2025 in the Senate, PP discourse became more combative and dismissive, describing the use of earpieces for interpretation services as "una chorrada" [a load of crap] (Senado, 2025, p. 143) and the use of translation services as "un ridículo" [a nonsense] (p. 144). Beyond tone, this reframes a policy question (linguistic equality) as a dispute over equipment, sidestepping substantive debate by trivialising the proposed reform.

A second recurring argumentative strategy is what we might term the 'never enough' frame, whereby recognition is cast as a slippery slope to an ever-expanding list of demands (p.143). This reframes discrete claims to equality as cumulative costs, activating topoi of burden and threat, through which any concession becomes precedent, thus justifying the maintenance of the status quo. Thirdly, PP speakers refer to their majority in the chamber, positioning themselves as the singular embodiment of the popular will and thus portraying dissent as procedural overreach: "lo que no es aceptable es que las minorías quieran sustituir a la mayoría." [what is not acceptable is that the minorities want to replace the majority] (p. 125).

In sum, analysis of this debate reveals that, the PP, once speaking from institutional dominance, abandons the relative moderation visible in the 2023 lower-house debate and leans into dismissal, escalation, and majoritarianism. This discursive reframing situates multilingual recognition not as an extension of rights but as an imposition on the majority, thereby legitimising the retention of Castilian primacy as the condition of democratic order. The Senate debate thus exemplifies how institutional context and parties' relation to power shape register, repertoire, and the boundaries of linguistic recognition. The next section now follows the scaling up of strategies such as these to the (2023-2025) wider societal debate on the status of the co-official languages in the EU.

[35] Note on transcripts: Unlike the Congress (since its 21 September 2023 reform), whose Diario de Sesiones (the UK equivalent would be Hansard) transcribes the original co-official language and a Spanish translation, Senate transcripts typically insert notes such as "(Continúa en catalán)" [continues in Catalan]/ "(Comienza en euskera)" [begins in Basque] rather than reproducing the non-Spanish text in full. This is itself a practical index of divergent institutional regimes of multilingualism between the chambers.

5.4 The EU and Multilingualism

The following section provides a brief synthesis of the 2023-2025 debate over the status of Catalan, Galician, and Basque in the EU. As discursive patterns here closely mirror those analysed in 5.2-5.3, this section does not repeat this analysis. Instead, the debate is briefly parsed to contextualise the wider discussions on language in Spain in this timeframe.

The push to grant Catalan, Galician and Basque official status at EU level flowed directly from post-23J bargaining that coupled symbolic with material concessions (Tort, 2023). On 17 August 2023 Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares formally requested their recognition before the EU Council, threading questions of European multilingualism into ongoing internal debates about language. The issue remained live in Spanish politics but has stalled twice (in May and then July) due to a lack of consensus among EU member states.

Throughout, press coverage consistently framed the EU stage as an extension of domestic struggles over power and legitimacy. In doing so, it reproduced at the international level the same oppositional binaries that structure Spain's internal debates (minority vs majority, pragmatism vs symbolism, unity vs fragmentation) in a process of fractal recursivity, where conflicts in one arena are mirrored and re-scaled to another (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003). While arguments for and against the inclusion of the co-official languages largely mirrored those discussed in the previous two sections, one interesting development is PP leader, Alberto Núñez Feijóo's lobbying of right-wing EU leaders to veto the proposal (RTVE, 2025). This drew on wider concerns of fellow EU states of legitimising/ acceding to minority claims that might embolden their own separatist movements (Van Den Berghe, 2003), some of which have strategically co-opted language as a political tool (Harguindéguy & Cole, 2013)[36]. In

[36] For more specific examples see:

- Jaffe, A. (2013). Ideologies in action: Language politics on corsica. In *Ideologies in Action*.
- Cetrà, D. (2019). *Nationalism, liberalism and language in Catalonia and Flanders*.
- Toutous, J. (2024). Mobiliser la langue pour faire entendre la périphérie: Étude comparée des mouvements nationalitaires bretons et sorabes au prisme de leurs revendications linguistiques. [Mobilising language to make the margins heard: a comparative study of the Breton and Sorbian nationalist movements through the lens of their linguistic claims].

this way, EU multilingualism became a venue for rearticulating and extending Spanish anxieties about sovereignty and fragmentation. Furthermore, by leveraging European partisan alliances, the PP underscores the depth of its opposition, institutional position and scale once again shaping the discourse it adopts. The chapter's conclusion now draws these strands together, specifying how political alignment and power shape the discursive framing of Spain's co-official languages at the state level.

5.5 Conclusion

Across Congress, the Senate, and the EU, institutional settings act as sites where linguistic hierarchies are entrenched, contested, and rescaled. Following 23J rhetoric of partisan vote trading and investiture arithmetic meant that co-official languages were no longer framed in the abstract but came to index questions of state legitimacy and sovereignty. In Congress, recognition of co-official languages was cast as either democratic inclusion or as capitulation to sub-state nationalists. In the Senate, the same reform was trivialised and inverted through majority/minority binaries. Finally, on the EU stage, Spain's internal linguistic debates were projected outwards to play on wider European anxieties about separatism. Similar arguments were repeated across scales, but their intensity and presentation varied with parties' shifting relations to power (Blommaert, 2007). This exemplifies Irvine and Gal's (2000/2003) notion of fractal recursivity, whereby oppositions migrate across contexts, enabling Spanish linguistic conflicts to be replicated and refracted rather than resolved. In this light, linguistic recognition is not a static achievement but a contingent, context-dependent process in which languages are continually repositioned and redefined.

Across all scales, however, this process remains bounded by Spain's linguistic hierarchy and the hegemonic standard of the *lengua común* (Castilian), against which co-official languages are measured. What emerges, therefore, is not merely politicisation but a dynamic of recursive contestation whereby recognition simultaneously reproduces and unsettles hierarchy. In state-wide parliamentary debates (2023-2025), minority claims are repeatedly represented as symbolic, excessive, or destabilising, as opposed to the 'neutrality' of Castilian. Yet these confrontations also expose the ideological labour sustaining that

hegemony, thus rendering it contestable. Together these patterns show how parties construct co-official languages discursively (RQ1), how those framings are recontextualised across settings and power configurations (tying indirectly to RQ2), and what they reveal about the reproduction and contestation of symbolic power within Spain's linguistic order (RQ3). The following chapters now turn away from the state-wide context and towards the historic communities themselves (Catalonia, Galicia, the BAC), beginning with Catalonia, to examine how the dynamics discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 are recontextualised in their distinct sociolinguistic and political settings.

6. Catalonia

6.1 Introduction

Catalonia has long been central to Spain's language politics, combining ambitious policies of linguistic normalisation with a sustained sovereignty movement, making language not only a matter of cultural policy but an ongoing site of political conflict. Building on the previous analysis of how institutional arenas recalibrate Spain's linguistic order, this chapter examines how Catalonia's 2024 election manifestos construct Catalan and with what effects for hierarchy and legitimacy. Manifestos from the following parties are examined: Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC), Junts per Catalunya (Junts), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), Partido Popular (PP), VOX, Comuns Sumar, Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP), and Aliança Catalana.[37] While SSNPs construct language in relation to sovereignty and belonging, they diverge in the ideological projects through which this is articulated. As at the state level, SWPs divide along left/right lines, with the left presenting Catalan in a more positive light (RQ1). SWP manifestos are also read in comparison with their 23J platforms to examine shifts in rhetoric across contexts (RQ2). Through these analyses, the chapter evaluates how linguistic hierarchies are cemented, reproduced, or unsettled in the Catalan context (RQ3).

Section 6.2 now outlines the context that situates the subsequent analysis.

6.2 Background

In line with the 1978 Constitution's framework of regionally bounded co-officiality, Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy designates Catalan as both an official language and the

[37] Socialists' Party of Catalonia, Together for Catalonia, Republican Left of Catalonia, People's Party, VOX, Commons Unite, Popular Unity Candidacy, and Catalan Alliance.

lengua propia[38] of the territory [its *own* (or *native*) language] whilst also recognising Castilian as official (Ley Orgánica 4/1979, art. 3.1-3.2). Although a legally indeterminate designation that does not, by itself, create superior status over Castilian (Ministerio de Justicia, 2011, pp. 78-81), placing the article on *lengua propia* before the attribution of official status symbolically elevates Catalan, with Castilian relegated to a secondary clause in the next article (LO 4/1979, art. 3.2). This framework centres Catalan as the unmarked language of institutional and public life, however, Castilian's continued role as a lingua franca within and beyond Catalonia keeps that status contested (Roller, 2002, pp. 277-281; Jiménez-Salcedo, 2019).

Normalisation policies in the 1980s-1990s translated the principal of the *llengua pròpia* into concrete measures. Under the extended period of CiU government (1980-2003) led by Jordi Pujol, the 1983 linguistic normalisation law expanded the use of Catalan across public administration and schooling (Strubell, 1996). This was extended by the 1998 linguistic policy law, which (amongst other measures) expanded the use of Catalan into the legal system (Hoffmann, 2000, p. 431). Subsequent legislation passed by PSC-led *tripartit*[39] governments between 2003-2010, such as the 2004 language and social cohesion plan and the 2009 Catalan Education Act, sought to rearticulate immersion as a way to foster civic integration in a period of rapid demographic changes (Trenchs-Parera & Newman, 2015; Erdocia, 2020).

This was followed by the reformed 2006 Statute of Autonomy which aimed to deepen Catalan's institutional status, declaring it the "la lengua de uso normal y preferente" [the language of normal and preferential use] in Catalan public institutions (Ley Orgánica 6/2006, art. 6.1). It also made Occitan/Aranese[40] official within Catalonia and recognised Aranese as the *lengua propia* of the Val d'Aran (Pla Boix, 2006). However, in 2010 the Constitutional Court issued a judgment that struck down or reinterpreted several clauses of the statute, including those affirming Catalan's preferential status and a symbolic reference to Catalonia as a nation (STC 31/2010). The ruling, which was widely condemned by political parties in Catalonia (with the notable exception of the PP), led to a wave of nationalist protests as well

[38] Llengua pròpia in Catalan.
[39] Three-party coalitions of PSC, ERC, ICV-EUiA (a now defunct alliance). Today PSC govern in minority with external support from ERC and En Comú Podem.
[40] «La lengua occitana, denominada aranés en Arán...» [The Occitan language, named Aranese in Arán…] (LO 6/2006, art. 6.5).

as a 5-point rise in support for independence (Faingold, 2016, pp. 151-152; Casas et al., 2024, p. 3203).

Tensions surrounding Catalonia's constitutional position culminated in the 2017 independence referendum, declared illegal by the Constitutional Court, leading to the temporary suspension of Catalan self-government under Article 155 of the Constitution (Torres Gutiérrez & Lecatelier, 2019). In the following years, linguistic debates were increasingly read through the lens of broader ideological disputes over sovereignty and identity. As such, language was presented not only as a matter of cultural policy but also as a symbolic battleground in the struggle over Catalonia's political status within Spain (Byrne et al., 2024). This has continued into the 2020s, for example post 23J negotiations involving amnesty for Catalan political leaders and language use in Congress (see Chapter 5), as well as debates over the 2020 education law (LOMLOE), which removed Castilian's status as the *lengua vehicular* [language of instruction] throughout Spain (Bernárdez-Gómez et al., 2025, p. 3).

These developments underscore how over time language has remained inseparable from wider questions of Catalan autonomy, identity, and sovereignty in Catalonia. Building on both the evolution of the language debate in Catalonia and the national dynamics discussed thus far, the following section examines how language was discursively constructed in the 2024 (12M) Catalan elections.

6.3 Manifesto Discourse

Following a tumultuous period in Catalan politics, the 2024 Catalan elections saw the pro-independence parties lose their combined parliamentary majority, marking a significant setback for the nationalist bloc, as the PSC emerged clearly as the largest party. The results were as follows: PSC (42), Junts (35), ERC (20), PP (15), VOX (11), Comuns Sumar (6), CUP (4), Aliança Catalana (2) (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2024).

6.3.1 Sub-State Nationalist Parties

During the campaign, all four SSNPs framed Catalan as the natural basis of Catalan sovereignty, yet their manifestos diverged in how they articulated this premise. ERC cast Catalan as a civic right, Junts as an institutional obligation, CUP as an existential necessity, and Aliança Catalana as an ethnonational boundary. The following analyses examine how these differences are discursively constructed.

6.3.1.1 Junts per Catalunya

Junts per Catalunya (more commonly just Junts) emerged in 2017 as a centre-right electoral coalition led by Carles Puigdemont, evolving into a formally structured political party in 2020 (Mompó & Barberà, 2025, p. 8).

Junts' manifesto predicates Catalan as "el nervi de la nació" [the nation's nerve] (Junts, 2024, p. 11). The metaphor of the nerve positions the language as the conduit of collective sensation and action of the Catalan people, binding disparate sections of society into a responsive whole. Furthermore, as nerves are highly sensitive and slow to repair, there is also an implied fragility in this image, suggesting the need for careful protection. Responsibility for this is assigned to the Spanish state: "… la minorització del català és un dels objectius de l'arquitectura política estatal des de fa moltes i moltes dècades." […the minoritisation of Catalan has been one of the objectives of the state's political architecture for many, many decades.] (Junts, 2024, p. 12). Through this claim language shift is cast as intentional policy rather than social drift, assigning clear agency and blame. Framed as decades-long, it recodes a present dispute as a structural injustice and legitimises independence as the solution.

The text also draws on traditional centre-right ideas of freedom and the role of the individual. Catalan is tied to the recovery of "les llibertats i l'autogovern perduts el 1714" [the freedoms and self-government lost in 1714] (Junts, 2024, p. 11). This anchors language policy in a memory of dispossession, legitimising current measures as historical redress, and language as

a tool for restoring sovereignty. At the same time, Catalan is framed as “eina d’integració al servei del progrés personal i la cohesió social” [a tool of integration that serves personal progress and social cohesion], repositioning it as a civic resource that binds a plural society. Furthermore, through the centre-right rhetoric of individual advancement, the text positions Catalan, not just as a right, but also as linguistic capital convertible into social and economic advantage (Bourdieu, 1991/2009). Finally, use of imperatives (e.g. “ha de ser la llengua vehicular” [must be the language of instruction]) projects Catalan as as much obligation as right, both mandating and naturalising Catalan primacy (Junts, 2024, p. 12).

6.3.1.2 Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), founded in 1931, is Catalonia’s oldest pro-independence party and represents a centre-left republican nationalism (Argelaguet et al., 2004, p. 10).

Throughout the 2024 manifesto, Catalan is nominated as both the “llengua comuna” [common (shared) language] and the “columna vertebral” [backbone] of Catalonia (e.g. ERC, 2024, p. 5, 18). On one level, *llengua comuna* implies a collective ownership of Catalan, thus grounding the language in social practice and communal culture (authenticity). On another, it echoes and subverts the state-wide use of *lengua común* for Castilian, recentring Catalan as the unmarked language of public life (anonymity) (Woolard, 2016). In addition, the metaphor of the Catalan language as the nation’s backbone frames it as fundamental functional infrastructure. By presenting it as indispensable, this also acts as justification for its inclusion and expansion throughout public life.

On the policy front, citizens are promised further “drets lingüístics” [language rights] across areas such as education, health, and justice, backed by a new *ministry for language policy* (ERC, 2024, pp. 32-33, 161-164). This aligns with left-wing SSNPs in other communities such as the BNG in Galicia (see Chapter 7), positioning language as an enforceable entitlement. By embedding linguistic rights within core domains of citizenship and linking them to institutional guarantees, the manifesto frames Catalan as a means of enabling equal

participation in public life. This moves away from resurgent ideologies of ethnic nationalism (where language is seen as an ethnic marker) and towards civic nationalism (where it is constructed as the practical basis of democratic inclusion and fairness).[41] In this way the manifesto constructs Catalan as the civic infrastructure of republican statehood.

6.3.1.3 La Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP)

The Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP), founded in the 1980s, represents a further left, anti-capitalist strand of Catalan independentism (Miró, 2021, p. 20). In its manifesto the party fuses socialism, feminism, and environmentalism with sovereigntist discourse.

This can also be seen in its discussion of the Catalan language: "El català es troba en una situació d'emergència per l'ofensiva política, judicial i mediàtica dels estats espanyol i francès i la pressió de la globalització capitalista" [Catalan is in a state of emergency due to the political, judicial and media offensive of the Spanish and French states and the pressure of capitalist globalisation.] (CUP, 2024, p. 71). By adopting a vocabulary of crisis, language shift is framed as a deliberate attack rather than a complex sociolinguistic process, with the explicit reference to Spain and France situating Catalan within a transnational field of domination. This narrative of emergency hyperbolises the sociolinguistic reality,[42] creating a sense of existential vulnerability to mobilise support for maximalist policy solutions. Moreover, by tying this to capitalism, the manifesto extends linguistic struggle beyond the territorial question, embedding it in CUP's broader critique of the neoliberal order. This rhetoric is underpinned by explicitly defensive language, with verbs such as blindar [to shield] (p. 67) equating the survival of Catalan with that of the nation and casting its protection as an existential duty. Equally, terms such as pla de xoc [emergency action plan] (p. 71), presupposes immediate, exceptional intervention. Catalan is thus cast simultaneously as the target of systemic oppression and, indirectly, as the medium of emancipation, aligning linguistic justice with wider anti-capitalist and decolonial struggles.

[41] Some have critiqued viewing these as a simple dichotomy, see for example Yack (1996) and Brubaker (1999).
[42] There are an estimated 10 million speakers of Catalan in the world (Ordóñez, 2022, p. 2).

6.3.1.4 Aliança Catalana

Aliança Catalana, founded in 2020 is the furthest to the right of any of the pro-independence parties discussed, combining secessionist demands with a nativist and exclusionary nationalism (Bohigues & Sendra, 2025, p. 7).

As with other SSNPs discussed in this section, Aliança Catalana foreground external threats, arguing that independence is the only way to secure the Catalan language. The text alludes to the of vulnerability of Catalan through a denunciation of "discriminació lingüística i altres menes de catalanofòbia" [linguistic discrimination and other forms of catalanophobia] (Aliança Catalana, 2024, p. 21). In positioning *catalanofòbia* as a deep-rooted issue, the text reframes Catalan speakers as a persecuted community, shifting linguistic decline from a demographic challenge to an attack from external groups. This is similar to the ideological work of VOX (and to a lesser extent the PP) discussed in previous chapters, rhetorically twisting the majority/minority positions to justify their political positions.

Consistent with broader far-right discourse, migrants are cast as a primary threat to both the language and the nation. The text claims that on current trends within a few decades "catalanoparlants" [Catalan speakers] (also referred to as "Els nostres parlants" [our speakers]) will only make up 5% of the population (p. 3). Used as a subtle boundary-marker, this figure highlights a key difference with other SSNPs discussed in this chapter, equating nativeness with authenticity and creating a threatened "we" of Catalan speakers opposed to an implied "they" of outsiders. This can be read as both nativism and natalism. That is to say that by naming immigration as a key factor of linguistic decline, it assumes that immigrants cannot become Catalan speakers, and that therefore the only legitimate speakers are native-born. In this way, the manifesto transforms Catalan from a civic resource into a defensive frontier. As such, continuity and revitalisation are imagined not through integration or policy but through restricting migration and safeguarding a native-speaking core.

Focus will now move from substate to state scale, tracing how language is positioned as risk, resource, or right across the major national parties within the Catalan context.

6.3.2 State-Wide Parties

Having looked at the discourse of SSNPs, this section now turns to the analysis of SWPs[43] within Catalonia. These parties' platforms are read comparatively to their 23J manifestos to trace to what extent discourses identified in Chapter 4 were adapted or reproduced when translated to a Catalan context.

6.3.2.1 Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC)

The PSC's manifesto illustrates the clearest difference across scales. At the state level, the PSOE signals general support for co-official languages through a bureaucratic language of economic opportunity, avoiding specific mention of Catalan. The PSC's 2024 programme is more full-throated, adopting the term *llengua pròpia* and describing Catalan as "la llengua que aquí va forjar-se i que aquí es juga el seu futur" [the language forged here and whose future is here] (PSC, 2024, p. 85). Bringing together a sense of territorial belonging and futurity, this frames Catalan as both shared patrimony and civic asset. Furthermore, by linking decision-making back to Catalonia, the party signals regional credibility in an Autonomous Community governed by SSNPs for over a decade, while also contesting right-wing hostility. Across scales then, Castilian is retained as the state's 'anonymous' medium, while Catalan is recoded as locally redeemable (yet territorially bounded) symbolic capital.

The manifesto rejects purely symbolic recognition in favour of technocratic guarantees, pledging to move language "del clàssic tractament simbòlic, sovint confús, sorollós i poc eficient, cap a un tractament rigorós, al servei d'objectius justos i precisos" [from the classic symbolic treatment, often confusing, noisy and inefficient, towards a rigorous treatment in

[43] The PSC is an autonomous party linked to PSOE by agreement, and Comuns-Sumar is a Catalan coalition aligned with Sumar. I treat both as the Catalan expressions of their respective SWP families for comparative purposes.

the service of fair and precise objectives] (PSC, 2024, p. 85). Despite seeming contradictions with the PSOE's symbolic treatment of language following 23J, the PSC's discourse here signals an attempt to shift debates on language from identity and sovereignty towards policy implementation. This allows the party to substantively address Catalan without reducing language to the question of sovereignty.

Taken together, this demonstrates how Socialist discourse adapts to scale-dependent electoral incentives. While the PSC seeks to distance Catalan from nationalist framings, at the state level the PSOE does not mention the language explicitly in its manifesto yet brings Catalan (and the other co-official languages) into the political arena when electorally useful (see Chapter 5).

6.3.2.2 Partit Popular de Catalunya (PPC)

The PPC's minimal discussion of language is consistent with the PP's 23J manifesto, which made only one explicit reference to the co-official languages. In Catalonia, the party's platform was a much shorter document, which also contained only one reference to language: "Tus hijos tendrán una educación de calidad y trilingüe." [Your children will have a quality, trilingual education.] (PPC, 2024). By avoiding specific mention of Catalan, the PPC denies it the symbolic importance placed on it by other parties, making an ideological statement through strategic silence. This allows the PPC to minimise ideological costs in a territory where it is relatively electorally minor (Catalonia has never been governed by the PPC) while still reproducing hierarchy through omission.

6.3.2.3 VOX

At the state level, VOX's 23J manifesto casts multilingualism as a threat to national unity and recodes minoritised language rights as discriminatory against Castilian speakers. Their Catalan platform reiterates this ideological hostility. Catalan is described as a "riqueza cultural" [cultural treasure], yet the same passage claims that "el español se niega […] a tantos catalanes en su propio país" [Spanish is denied … to many Catalans in their own

country] (VOX, 2024a, p. 4). In this way Catalan is given a tokenistic value positioned within Spain's broader cultural heritage, while Castilian is framed as the language in real need of protection. Furthermore, while the party claims they will defend Catalan (p. 4), by branding immersion and language requirements as "imposición" [imposition] (p. 5) and "discriminación," (p. 31) VOX delegitimates the mechanisms that sustain Catalan's civic and institutional presence and recentres Castilian as the legitimate language of public life.

The above demonstrates that rather than adapting its 23J language to regional conditions, VOX extends its rhetoric. Where the state-wide programme framed multilingualism as a distortion of equality, the Catalan text intensifies the vocabulary of imposition and victimhood. This nonetheless makes VOX the most coherent party in its discourse across scales.

6.3.2.4 Comuns Sumar

At the Spain-wide level, Sumar's 23J manifesto frames linguistic justice in redistributive terms, extending recognition to co-official and non-recognised languages alike. In Catalonia, Comuns Sumar retains this pluralist ethos but narrows its focus. For example, Catalan and Aranese are singled out as "llengües a protegir" [languages to protect] and linked explicitly to cultural vitality (Comuns Sumar, 2024, pp. 85-86). The text uses rhetorically strong and active verbs such as "prioritzar, impulsar, protegir i fomentar" [prioritise, promote, protect and foster] (p. 84) to refer to the role of the Catalan government in language policy, suggesting that not only does it have the power to act, but also the obligation. The verb *prioritzar* is especially significant here, as it suggests asymmetric treatment in favour of Catalan, moving the party closer towards the rejected language of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy and thus towards sub-state nationalist frames.

However, it would not be accurate to suggest that the Comuns Sumar's discourse represents an uncomplicated contestation of hierarchy. The 2024 manifesto introduces a binary between "llengües minoritàries" [minority languages] and "llengües majoritàries o franques" [majority or lingua francas] (p. 84), placing Catalan and Aranese together in the former. Classing the

two languages together like this elides their sizeable difference in scales and linguistic capital, casting Catalan, a language with millions of speakers, as equally vulnerable as Aranese. Misunderstanding linguistic stratification in this way leads linguistic hierarchy to be seen as a simplified, two-tiered, system of domination. This obscures gradients of power and thus risks the misdiagnosis of community-specific needs. While this is not a concretisation of the linguistic hierarchy, neither is it an entirely coherent contestation.

On the whole, there is very little difference in discourse between Sumar at the state level and Comuns in Catalonia. While analysis may raise issues around the simplification of the sociolinguistic landscape, this should not be read as a means of disregarding the group's overall ideological work, which, by-and-large, challenges linguistic hierarchy and political orthodoxy across scales.

6.4 Conclusion

Analysis of the 2024 Catalan election shows that Catalan functions as a symbolic resource through which parties negotiate legitimacy, sovereignty, and belonging. Among SSNPs, Catalan is discursively constructed as the natural basis of sovereignty but is refracted through contrasting ideological projects: civic inclusion (ERC), personal and institutional freedom (Junts), counter-hegemonic resistance (CUP), and ethnonational exclusion (Aliança Catalana) (RQ1). These differences highlight how minoritised languages serve not only as tools of resistance to state hegemony but also as indices of competing projects of nationhood at the sub-state level.

Of the SWPs it is only the PSC that meaningfully adapts their discourse to the Catalan context, albeit after the PSOE's 2023 pivot towards the co-official languages at state level. The PP is consistent with its 23J manifesto in its relative silence on the issue. While (Comuns) Sumar's language does not significantly change across contexts, VOX's rhetoric sharpens, highlighting the party's conflation of language revitalisation policies with separatism. Taken together, these dynamics suggest that cross-level coherence (at least between these two contexts) correlates with ideological rigidity, whereas movement occurs chiefly where governability and coalition breadth are at stake (RQ2).

Hierarchy is reproduced by both strategic non-engagement and attempts to brand Catalan as partisan while attacking the mechanisms that sustain it. It is contested where Catalan is naturalised as essential civic infrastructure and treated as the baseline for participation in public life, reallocating symbolic capital (RQ3). Pro-Catalan discourse from parties on both sides of the constitutional divide may de-escalate the partisan charge around the language by diffusing ownership of it beyond the SSNPs. However, VOX undercuts this by coupling revitalisation with separatism, keeping it politicised.

Chapter 7 now turns to look at Galicia to examine how language is constructed in a context with vastly different power dynamics, a smaller party field, and a distinct sociolinguistic landscape and history.

7. Galicia

7.1 Introduction

Moving from the overtly politicised field of Catalonia, Galicia provides an example of how a quieter politics can be equally effective in reinforcing linguistic hierarchy. The following chapter expands on this idea through its analyses of the 2024 manifestos of the Partido Popular de Galicia (PPdeG), the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG), and the Partido dos Socialistas de Galicia (PSdeG) in an attempt to understand how the autonomous community's political landscape shapes or alters party discourse.[44] The PPdeG normalises language shift through discourses of coexistence and individual choice. By contrast, the BNG frames Galician as an unrestricted right and as a (if not the) constitutive marker of national identity. The PSdeG largely sidesteps the issue and minimises exposure. In a region where language policy was historically characterised by its relative lack of conflict, these strategies nonetheless shape hierarchy by redistributing legitimacy, agency and obligation between institutions and speakers. The chapter addresses RQ1 on partisan constructions of the co-official languages and RQ3 on their effects on linguistic hierarchy. Addressing RQ2, the PPdeG is compared with the state-level PP, and the PSdeG with the PSOE.

Section 7.2 now outlines the historical, political, and sociolinguistic context that situates this analysis.

7.2 Background

Following the 1981 Statute of Autonomy naming Galician as a co-official language, the early years of autonomous government in Galicia saw several concrete advances in language

[44] Peoples Party of Galicia, Socialists' party of Galicia, Galician Nationalist Block.

policy. For example, the Lei de Normalización Lingüística [Linguistic Normalisation Law] (1983) and the institutionalisation of a standard through the Real Academia Galega [Royal Galician Academy] and the Instituto da Lingua Galega [Galician Language Institute] (Ramallo & Rei-Doval, 2015). However, these gains occurred in a linguistic marketplace characterised by unstable diglossia, with Castilian retaining greater prestige and functional breadth, Galician carrying local authenticity, and both coexisting uneasily amid diverse identity positions and disputes over linguistic authority (Monteagudo, 2024; O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013).

Since the return to democracy, Galician politics have been dominated by the PP which has held almost uninterrupted power (Lagares Diez, 2024).[45] Under the presidency of Manuel Fraga (1990-2005) a discourse of 'harmonious bilingualism' was adopted, nominally promoting Galician where uncontentious and defaulting to a hands-off stance when disputes arose (Beswick, 2007, p. 177; O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024). Furthermore, there was often a lack of sufficient funding and enforcement which reduced the effectiveness of many of these initiatives (Losada Trabada, 2022, pp. 453-454). Against this backdrop, in September 2004 the '*Plan Xeral de Normalización da Lingua Galega'* [General Plan for Galician Language Normalisation], which made a series of proposals for the expansion of Galician across public life, was approved unanimously (Nandi, 2018, p. 36).

Following the 2005 election, the new PSdeG-BNG government brought in the end of so-called harmonious bilingualism, in favour of a more active policy of normalisation, going beyond the 2004 plan (Losada, 2012, pp. 283-284). To this end Decree 124/2007[46] was passed, mandating that at least 50% of instruction across all stages of education be conducted in Galician (Gradín Martínez, 2020, p. 35). However, when the PPdeG returned to power in 2009, this decree was repealed and replaced by the 2010 'Decreto de Plurilingüismo' [multilingualism decree]. This mandated strict parity between Galician and Castilian in education, assigning particular subjects to each language, while also permitting the teaching of certain non-linguistic subjects in a foreign language, usually English (Nandi, 2018, p. 37). This arguably represented a regression for Galician, as by moving from a framework of positive discrimination to one of numerical parity that ignored the unequal sociolinguistic

[45] Also the party's predecessor Alianza Popular [People's Alliance].
[46] DECRETO 124/2007, de 28 de Junio, Por El Que Se Regula El Uso y La Promoción Del Gallego En El Sistema Educativo. [Decree Regulating the Use and Promotion of Galician in the Education System].

baseline, language shift was facilitated (Gradín Martínez, 2020, p. 55; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017, p. 57). The move could therefore be argued to be ideological, in-line with the PP's ideas of linguistic freedom which would come to define the new era of 'bilingüismo cordial' [friendly bilingualism] (see 7.3.1) (Monteagudo, 2024, pp. 11-12; O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024, p. 242).

On the metrics of habitual use and transmission, outcomes under bilingüismo cordial are uneven. The Instituto Galego de Estatística's 2023 survey shows that only 16.92% of children aged 5-14 report habitually speaking Galician (always or more often than Castilian) (Instituto Galego de Estatística, 2024, p. 3). Furthermore, according to Monteagudo et al. (2020, pp. 8-9): 53.6% of families maintain Galician, 22% have ceased transmission, and 2.4% have reversed a prior shift. On the other hand, the rise of 'new speakers' (neofalantes; typically younger, urban bilinguals who acquired Galician outside the home) both expands use into domains long dominated by Spanish and unsettles inherited authenticity regimes (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013; O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2015). However, while such revalorisation can disrupt established hierarchies, it also risks generating new ones as claims to authority are renegotiated around authenticity, standardisation, and expertise (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013, pp. 289-291, 301).

Having set out the context, the next section examines how PPdeG, BNG and PSdeG position themselves in relation to the Galician language in their 2024 manifestos.

7.3 Manifestos

The 2024 Galician elections, the first since Alberto Núñez Feijóo[47] moved to the national stage, continued the pattern of PP hegemony in the region. Throughout the campaign the PPdeG were expected to be, by far, the largest party, leaving the core question to be whether they could hold onto their absolute majority. In the event, the PPdeG secured 40 seats out of the available 75, the BNG increased its representation to 25, and the PSdeG fell to 9 (Xunta

[47] Former Galician president, and now leader of the state-level PP.

de Galicia, 2024)[48]. This result served to confirm conservative dominance in the Autonomous Community while consolidating the BNG's position as the principal opposition.

In the parties' manifestos, this dynamic translated into distinct language-policy positions: the PPdeG legitimised continuity through a discourse of harmony and coexistence; the BNG advanced a rights-driven revitalisation agenda; while the PSdeG, squeezed between these poles, adopted a cautious, low-profile stance.

7.3.1 Partido Popular de Galicia (PPdeG)

The Partido Popular de Galicia (PPdeG) has consistently presented itself as the defender of linguistic coexistence. Over time, its discourse has shifted from 'harmonious bilingualism' (discussed above) towards 'bilingüismo cordial' [friendly bilingualism], putting greater emphasis on freedom and choice (Losada, 2012, pp.292-294). This framing has recently been taken up on a Spain-wide scale by former Galician president, and now leader of the state-level PP, Alberto Núñez Feijóo.[49] This discursive focus on freedom has allowed the PP to take an overall "laissez-faire" approach to language policy (O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024, p. 242). That is to say, even if policy is not overtly discriminatory, such an approach can constitute what Rawkins (1987) terms "benign neglect"- i.e. failure to level an unequal linguistic playing field can also negatively impact minoritised language use.

This ideology presents itself in the party's 2024 manifesto. The text describes Galician as "unha lingua viva en constante evolución" [a living language in constant evolution] (PPdeG, 2024, p. 113). The predication of Galician as 'living' positions it as marked against Castilian, the unmarked norm that needs no such affirmation. However, asserting vitality where it would ordinarily go without saying presupposes contestation and, in doing so, unintentionally draws attention to the precarity the claim aims to conceal. 'Constant evolution' treats change as natural and ongoing. By linking the language's health to its capacity to evolve, falling use

[48] Democracia Ourensana (mentioned in Chapter 3) also had one MP elected.
[49] See for example a political position paper released by the PP for their 2025 conference:
"Defendemos un bilingüismo cordial que busque la convivencia equilibrada entre las lenguas cooficiales en los distintos territories."
[We advocate a 'friendly bilingualism' that aims for balanced coexistence between the co-official languages in their respective regions]. (Partido Popular, 2025, p.12).

can be framed as normal development rather than loss. This in turn legitimises inaction by constructing decline as a routine stage of the language's life cycle.

The later statement "en Galicia hoxe non existe un conflito lingüístico e somos un exemplo de convivencia entre dúas linguas" [in Galicia today there is no linguistic conflict and we are a model of coexistence between two languages] (PPdeG, 2024, p. 136) is interesting on two levels. Firstly, 'there is no linguistic conflict' is a sweeping denial which acts to sideline and discursively erase contrary evidence, closing off debate (Irvine & Gal, 2000/2003). Secondly, claiming to be a 'model of coexistence' reframes the issue as settled, casting Galicia as a benchmark for other regions, and thereby naturalising the linguistic order while muting calls for policy changes. Together, this denial and self-proclaimed exemplarity make the status quo appear self-evident, erasing internal asymmetries and naturalising hierarchy as doxa[50] under the banner of coexistence (Bourdieu, 1977/2010).

The manifesto also relies heavily on generalisation and evidentiality to shut down debate. Phrases such as "os datos avalan" [the data support] and "hoxe falan galego máis persoas ca hai cinco anos" [today more people speak Galician than five years ago] close off contestation by presenting interpretation as fact (PPdeG, 2024, p. 137). Universalising pronouns such as "contamos cun modelo propio" [we have our own model] and "somos un exemplo" [we are an example] collapse the population into a single 'we', constructing an imagined unity in which internal divergence is erased. Furthermore, by recoding opponents as "determinados grupos minoritarios" [certain minority groups] the text minoritises disagreement, relocating it to a marginal 'other' and pre-emptively disqualifying it as a matter of public concern.

Overall, the PPdeG's rhetoric of coexistence reframes policy as personal freedom, while denying conflict and dissent. This allows the party to legitimise inaction and thus consolidate the status quo.

7.3.2 Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG)

[50] When a socially and historically constructed hierarchy is misrecognised as natural and therefore as 'common-sense' and beyond question. See (Bourdieu, 1972/2010b, pp. 159-171).

The Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) is a left-wing nationalist party that advocates Galician self-determination and places the promotion of the Galician language at the centre of its political project (Van Morgan, 2006, 456-458). In recent years it has seen its support increase, overtaking the PSOE in vote share and seats in the 2020 regional election, widening its lead in 2024.

Of the parties considered, the BNG articulates the most assertive position on language. By placing “lingua” [language] first in a list of constitutive markers of nationhood, the party signals its primacy on its agenda (BNG, 2024, p. 6). This is further expressed in the push for a “dereito a usarmos a nosa lingua en todo momento e en todo lugar” [right to use our language at all times and in all places] (p. 7) which positions Galician as an absolute right, shifting the burden of revitalisation from individuals (as with bilingüismo cordial) to institutions. Moreover, Galician is predicated as “única e insubstituíbel” [unique and irreplaceable], “un sinal de identidade” [a sign of identity], and “unha das súas [do pobo galego] maiores creacións” [one of their (the Galician people’s) greatest creations] (p. 17). These formulations blend patrimonial and existential registers, presenting Galician as both a creation of the people and a condition of their being. Additionally, the use of superlatives and absolutes casts Galician as irreplaceable, recasting its protection as an obligation rather than a choice.

While describing Galician as having a structuring role, the BNG also uses imagery to construct a more fluid understanding of language. References to language policy as a “corrente continua” [steady current] and to Galician as a “vaso comunicante” [communicating vessel] present it less as a fixed structure than as something designed to circulate across domains, linking otherwise separate areas of both public and governmental life (p. 17). The same passage also stresses the role of the language in the “integración das persoas que proceden de fóra” [integration of people arriving from elsewhere]. By aligning this ‘inside/outside’ contrast with ‘integration’, the party recasts language as a bridge rather than a barrier. In this framing belonging becomes both civic and learnable, combatting pejorative associations of nationalism with exclusionary politics.

The manifesto contrasts this inclusive narrative with a sense of urgency, characterising the linguistic situation as “perigosa” [dangerous] (p. 17). This is justified by the phrase “todos os estudos sociolingüísticos conveñen” [all sociolinguistic studies agree], which casts decline as an unnuanced fact rather than a partisan claim, effectively shutting down disagreement.

Existing policy frameworks are labelled “nefasto” [disastrous] and juxtaposed with proposed solutions such as the *Plan de Impulso da Lingua Galega* [Plan for the Promotion of the Galician Language] (p. 74) or the embedding of Galician in digital infrastructures through a “departamento de lingua e tecnoloxías intelixentes” [department of language and smart technologies] (p. 132). This contrast strengthens a narrative of rupture and renewal, whereby past policies are cast as inadequate or damaging, while the BNG’s programme is framed as forward-looking, and equipped to guarantee Galician’s survival in both traditional and emerging domains.

In essence, the BNG frames Galician as an unequivocal right. In contrast to the PPdeG, the group puts the onus of language revitalisation on government and institutions rather than on individuals. In doing so they recognise and contest the underlying dynamics of hierarchy still present in Galician (and wider Spanish) society.

7.3.3 Partido dos Socialistas de Galicia (PSdeG)

In the PSdeG’s 2024 manifesto, the only mention of language policy with direct implications for Galician is the call to revise the plurilingual school model, described as a *“*fracaso*”* [failure] to be corrected through *“*medidas de choque*”* [drastic measures] (PSdeG, 2024, p. 9). Borrowing from the language of crisis management, this rhetoric creates a sense of urgency, while simultaneously positioning the PSdeG as a decisive, reforming force. However, by reducing the issue of language revitalisation to the technocratic repair of one defective element of policy, the manifesto sidesteps broader questions of linguistic rights, normalisation, and identity.

This near absence of substantive language policy proposals is itself significant, potentially highlighting how the PSdeG wishes to minimise engagement with an electorally fraught issue while still signalling opposition to the ruling conservatives. This is consistent with political science work on *issue ownership*, which explains that voters associate certain issues with particular parties and that candidates therefore often avoid contesting issues that their opponents ‘own’ (Petrocik, 1996). In the 2024 Galician election, the BNG was pushing for

wide expansions in language policy, while the PP 'owned' the rhetoric of *bilingüismo cordial.* For the PSdeG, therefore, emphasising either would risk inviting disadvantageous comparisons. Moreover, given the regional success of 'harmonious' and 'friendly' bilingualism discourses, and polarisation of debate surrounding co-official languages at state-level, language policy would likely offer very little electoral yield for the PSdeG in Galicia, making them less likely to focus on it (De Sio & Weber, 2014). Finally, research suggests parties will often minimise exposure by avoiding clear, divisive commitments and adopting ambiguity (Weaver, 1986). This should also be read against developments in the Spain-wide context since 23J, as language was becoming increasingly associated with sub-state nationalist politics and parties through the Socialist government's negotiations (see chapter 5).

As the conclusion argues, this risk-averse minimalism operates less as policy than as electoral positioning work, reinforcing the existing linguistic hierarchy through inaction and by ceding the agenda to opponents.

7.4 Conclusion

In Galicia, parties adopt three distinct positions on language. The PPdeG naturalises hierarchy via *bilingüismo cordial*, denying conflict and recentring individual choice. The BNG contests it by framing Galician as an unbounded and unequivocal right, shifting obligation for revitalisation from individual speakers to institutions. Whereas the PSdeG largely sidesteps the question (RQ1).

Within the sociolinguistic landscape of Galicia both the PSOE and the PP's discourses differ from that at state level. The PSdeG, in a distant third place, and therefore having less to gain electorally, has relatively little to say in comparison with the national party. This further suggests what was highlighted in Chapter 5, namely, that the Socialists' positioning post 23J seems to emerge from what is most politically convenient in a given context. On the other hand, the PPdeG has more to say on language than its counterparts on the national stage. The party's dominance in the region allows them to perform a laissez-faire policy of benign

neglect, rather than adopting the more strident rhetoric seen from the PP in Chapters 4 and 5. However, it is notable that under Feijóo, the language of *bilingüismo cordial* is being scaled up to a Spain-wide audience (RQ2).

Read as a whole, these manifestos show that linguistic hierarchy in Galicia is (re)produced not by overt discriminatory policy or discourse, but by continuing to allow language shift through inaction under the guise of linguistic freedom, shifting responsibility for revitalisation efforts from institutions to individuals. This is challenged through ideological work resignifying language as a right, obligation, and a bridge for new speakers. However, because the BNG is the only major political party actively advancing this agenda, there is a risk that the perceived link between minoritised language rights and separatist politics will be further entrenched (RQ3).

The next chapter turns to the Basque Autonomous Community, tracing its distinct historical, sociolinguistic, and political landscapes.

8. The Basque Autonomous Community

8.1 Introduction

The chapter examines the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) as a consolidated yet contested regime of bilingualism and asks how 2024 party programmes negotiate the relationship between linguistic rights and obligations. The corpus comprises the 2024 regional manifestos of Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Partido Nacionalista Vasco (EAJ-PNV), Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu), Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra (PSE-EE), Partido Popular del País Vasco (PP), Sumar, and VOX.[51] Analysis traces how these texts frame the promotion, recognition, and use of Basque across education, public administration, and beyond, and how such framings reproduce or challenge linguistic hierarchy (RQ1, RQ3), while positioning regional stances in relation to each party's state-level discourse (RQ2).

Section 8.2 now outlines the historical, political, and sociolinguistic context that situates this analysis.

8.2 Background

As in the Catalan and Galician cases, the BAC's 1979 statute of autonomy made Basque (Euskara) co-official with Castilian (Ley Orgánica 3/1979, art. 6). The subsequent 1982 Basque Language Normalisation Law translated this into policy by mandating measures to guarantee administrative and judicial language rights, set education models, promote media use, and extend Basque to social and economic life (Ley 10/1982).

While autonomy provided the legal scaffolding for normalisation, Basque had already long been linked to politics. In the late nineteenth century, Sabino Arana (founder of the PNV)

[51] Translations of names: Basque Nationalist Party, Basque Country Unite, Socialist Party of the Basque Country-Basque Left, People's Party of the Basque Country, Unite, VOX.

framed Basque nationhood around religion and race, with language as a secondary (though important) marker of difference (Conversi, 1990; Urla, 2012, pp. 48-50). In 1959, however, a new organisation known as ETA[52] was founded by a group of nationalist students (Ekin) that had begun to distance themselves from the PNV in the early 1950s (Claesson, 2022, pp. 67-68). ETA placed language at the centre of nationalist ideology recasting it as the essence of the nation and an instrument of liberation (Murua, 2017, p. 15). This idea of Basque was embodied by the creation of *ikastolak* ("semi-clandestine" Basque-medium schools), in the 1950s, seen as an act of resistance against the Franco regime (Claesson, 2022, pp. 68-69). ETA would soon go on to embrace armed struggle, yet they still framed Basque as a key tool in a socialist, anti-imperialist struggle against Francoist repression and for independence (Zabalo Bilbao & Odriozola Irizar, 2017). This cemented Basque nationalism's distinctly linguistic centre of gravity, contrasting with Arana's race-centred conception of nationhood and laying the foundations for the modern *abertzale* left[53].

Since 1980, the PNV have governed the BAC almost continuously. The sole exception to this was between 2009 and 2012, when Patxi López of the PSE-EE led a minority government. This brief interlude highlighted both the volatility of late-2000s Basque politics and the depth of PNV's longer-term hegemony, as the party returned to office in 2012 and has remained there since. In recent decades, Basque language policy has been increasingly framed as consensual and collaborative, with institutions prioritising consensus-building and managerial approaches (Apodaka et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, language policy in the BAC has not escaped national-level politicisation. During the 2000s, counter-terrorism policy in Spain increasingly treated the wider nationalist left as an integrated structure, collapsing distinctions between ETA's armed campaign and the political/civic expressions of Basque nationalism across the *abertzale* left (Whitfield, 2015). Although this receded following the legalisation of EH Bildu, the associative framing conflating Basque nationalist politics and national symbols with past violence has persisted in segments of state-wide political and media discourse (Bourne, 2018).

[52] Euskadi Ta Askatasuna [Basque Country and Freedom].
[53] This refers to the left-wing nationalist space. During the democratic transition, it was channelled through Herri Batasuna, but from 2002 was outlawed. After ETA's permanent cessation of violence in 2011 and formal dissolution in 2018, the *abertzale* left was returned to legality through the creation of Sortu and the coalition EH Bildu, which is now the main challenger to the PNV (Bourne, 2018).

It is against this backdrop, along with that laid out in chapters 4 and 5, that the following section analyses the manifestos of the parties elected to the Basque parliament in 2024.

8.3 Manifesto Analysis

The 2024 Basque elections saw EH Bildu make notable gains to draw level with the PNV. Together, the two nationalist groups won 67.61% of the vote and 72% of seats (Gobierno Vasco, 2024b). However, rather than govern together, as seen in previous Catalan governments of the late 2010s/early 2020s, the PNV stayed in government by forming a coalition with the PSE-EE. The final results were: EAJ-PNV (27), EH Bildu (27), PSE-EE (12), PP (7), Sumar (1), VOX (1) (Gobierno Vasco, 2024, pp. 4-5).

8.3.1 Sub-State Nationalist Parties

Basque underpins both SSNP manifestos, but each takes a different approach to the language. The PNV focuses on legality and continuity, whereas EH Bildu casts continuity as stagnation and proposes an inclusive, yet still stratified, view of nationalism.

8.3.2.1 Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea- Partido Nacionalista Vasco (EAJ-PNV)

The EAJ-PNV is a moderate Christian-democratic nationalist party (Barberà & Barrio, 2017). Compared with EH Bildu, the PNV takes a more incremental approach to self-government, instead prioritising stability and institutional continuity (Elias & Mees, 2017).

Despite the centrality of language to Basque nationalism discussed above, the PNV's manifesto presents it as "no sólo una cuestión de identidad […] También es una cuestión de justicia, legalidad y derechos" [not only a question of identity… It is also a question of

justice, legality and rights] (EAJ-PNV, 2024, p. 72). This reframes the promotion of Basque as the fulfilment of legal obligations and the enforcement of constitutional rights. In this sense, language policy becomes a measure of good governance and democratic legitimacy, rather than nationalist identity work.

Throughout the text, verbs such as *avanzar* (p.64), *multiplicar* (p. 72), and *ganar (nuevos ámbitos…)* [secure new domains…] (p. 72) present language revitalisation as a process of continuous expansion, articulating an ideology of managed continuity in which Basque's growth is incremental, cumulative, and inevitable. By presupposing growth, these verbs work to shift debate from whether the Basque language should have a greater public presence to how quickly and by what means this should be achieved.

The manifesto also projects Basque outward, attaching it to innovation, competitiveness, and international legitimacy. For example, it positions the language as a modernising resource, pledging to promote its digital presence by creating a Corpus Digital del Euskera, linked to the European framework of digital linguistic resources (p. 58). Tying Basque to European frameworks also functions as an act of scale-making[54], relocating it within wider transnational regimes and aiming to secure its symbolic and economic value beyond the regional frame (Gal, 2016).

Overall, as one might expect from the incumbent party of government, the ideology that emerges is one of managed continuity. Basque is presented in legal and economic terms that naturalise expansion and revitalisation as the pragmatic baseline of language policy. This contrasts with EH Bildu in the next section, who situate Basque within a wider call for societal transformation.

8.3.2.2 Euskal Herria Bildu (EH Bildu)

[54] Scale-making is defined here as the semiotic and ideological practice of (re)positioning a language, practice, or policy initiative at a higher or lower level (e.g. regional, national, European) so that different audiences, rules, and resources apply (Gal, 2016, pp. 91-93).

EH Bildu is a coalition of left-wing nationalist forces which represents the radical, pro-independence left across the Basque Country (Beldarrain-Durandegui & Alves De Souza Filho, 2023, p. 83).

In its discourse, EH Bildu builds on the centrality of language to the nationalist project, framing the success of revitalisation policy as a key metric of inter-SSNP differentiation and competence. Against this backdrop, the party's 2024 manifesto casts the linguistic and political status quo as dysfunctional. This is emphasised through lexical choices such as "agotamiento" [exhaustion] (p. 75), "colapse [sic]", and "punto muerto" [deadlock] (p. 86), which collectively position Basque as at risk, casting continuity as inadequate and indicting the PNV for perceived stagnation. This sense of risk is made concrete through "la debilitación de los arnasgunes" [the weakening of 'breathing spaces'[55]] (p. 86), i.e. the tangible erosion of protected domains of use. Although an established policy term, 'the weakening of breathing spaces' also carries corporeal connotations, suggesting the asphyxiation of linguistic vitality, and thus amplifying a sense of emergency and danger. This rhetoric weaponises alleged decline, contrasting EH Bildu with the PNV, who are portrayed as complicit.

The manifesto repeatedly refers to "euskaldunización" [the process of becoming a Basque speaker] (e.g. pp. 76, 86-88). The term for a Basque person is *euskaldun*, literally "one who has Basque", which highlights the integral link between language and Basque identity, making linguistic competence a key boundary of belonging (Ortega et al., 2015, p. 94). Taking these facts together, the term *euskaldunización* can be read as indexing a politics of integration that ties civic belonging to linguistic capital and advances an inclusive nationalism. This logic extends to the issue of migration, where linguistic diversity is valorised, and Basque is explicitly framed as the language of "integración social" (p. 132). However, inclusion does not dissolve hierarchy. Rather, the linguistic market is re-centred on Basque as the legitimate language, with Spanish and other languages welcomed yet secondary (Bourdieu, 1991/2009).

[55] Breathing spaces are a concept first introduced by Joshua Fishman in his work on Reversing Language Shift, where he defined them as "demographically concentrated" spaces where minoritised languages can operate as if they were the dominant, unmarked variety (Fishman, 1991, p. 58). The term has evolved over time to also include digital spaces.

In contrast, the next section analyses the SWPs' manifestos and, following earlier chapters, sets these frames against the parties' state-level discourse.

8.3.2 State-Wide Parties

The following section analyses SWP programmes in relation to their state-wide discourse, emphasising both the persistence of national narratives and Basque-specific recalibrations in the framing of Basque.

8.3.2.1 Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra (PSE-EE)

In its 2024 manifesto, the PSE-EE sums up its language policy in the slogan "Euskera sin imposiciones; Euskera sin limitaciones" [Basque without impositions; Basque without limits] (PSE-EE, 2024, p. 117). As a discursive strategy, this phrase constructs moderation, positioning the party as the rational middle ground between extremes of linguistic imposition and abandonment. Within this framing, the rejection of *imposición* and "exigencia" [requirement] (p. 118) suggests a commitment to individual choice. However, by adopting this vocabulary, it echoes right-wing narratives that cast language requirements as disproportionate overreach, thereby making normalisation measures appear as undue interference and diminishing their perceived legitimacy.

Consistent with this logic, the manifesto makes a specific point about depoliticisation. Yet the claim that "es necesario alejar a nuestra lengua del debate político" (PSE-EE, 2024, p. 118) is itself political. It acknowledges politicisation while displacing responsibility onto unnamed others, obscuring the party's own role in the process. From a viewpoint of policy and ideology as practice (Spolsky, 2004), this claim is difficult to reconcile with the PSOE's state-level actions in recent years (see Chapter 5). In effect, the party calls for depoliticisation of a field that it has played a key role in politicising.

Overall, while the state-wide PSOE has shifted toward a more overtly expansionist line on the co-official languages the PSE-EE strikes a tone of moderation, combining the "sin limitaciones" of leftist/SSNP discourse, with the "sin imposiciones" of the right.

8.3.2.2 Partido Popular del País Vasco/Euskadiko Alderdi Popularra (PP)

Unlike the PP at state-level, in the BAC the party's manifesto makes repeated and extended reference to the Basque language. Mirroring the rhetoric of the PPdeG (and increasingly the Spain-wide PP), the manifesto focuses on freedom and *convivencia*. In line with this, the programme juxtaposes supportive gestures, such as backing cultural production in Basque and Castilian, with proposed policy rollbacks, such as suspending language requirements and ending the alleged "sobrevaloración" [overvaluing] (PP, 2024, p. 145) of Basque in hiring. This term carries pejorative connotations that reshape perception of normalisation measures not as corrective but as distortions of merit, casting the language's institutional promotion as an unjust exaggeration of its worth.

Just as language requirements in employment are cast as disproportionate, education policy is presented as the nationalist *"*instrumentalización*"* of Basque (pp. 118-119). This labelling shifts scrutiny from outcomes (Basque competence, equal access) to motives (nationalist intent), casting schools as sites of partisan interference. As such, Castilian is reasserted as the 'neutral' language of instruction, while Basque-medium schooling is portrayed as a divisive ideological project. Coupled with the assertion of "sobrevaloración", this builds a coherent story of distortion, so planned reversals of current policy read as restoring fairness rather than curtailing linguistic rights or unravelling corrective measures introduced to compensate for historical minoritisation.

In short, while the PP's state-level manifesto largely skirts the issue of language, in the BAC the party ties Basque to what it portrays as excessive nationalist intervention.

8.3.2.3 VOX

As in other VOX programmes, the party is the most discursively forceful of those examined. In the Basque case, however, language is not simply politicised but entangled with narratives of indoctrination and national disloyalty.

VOX's Basque manifesto pledges to "poner fin a la inmersión lingüística que utiliza el euskera como método de adoctrinamiento del separatismo" [put an end to linguistic immersion which uses Basque as a method of separatist indoctrination] (VOX, 2024b, p. 25). Characterising immersion as indoctrination shifts the frame from education to manipulation, inviting a moral panic that links Basque instruction to separatism and recasts schools as suspect spaces on the front line of the culture wars. This is extended through the metaphor of immersion as a "secuestro separatista" [separatist kidnapping] (p. 25), positioning students as hostages and nationalist educators as captors. Cumulatively these discursive moves construct language policy as political violence, thereby legitimising its reversal.

In addition to the explicit choices laid out above, VOX also employs implicit strategies to stigmatise the Basque language. One example is how arguments are sequenced in the programme to draw links in the reader's mind. For instance, on page 26 of the manifesto, where the pledge "promoveremos el aprendizaje de nuestra lengua propia" [we will promote the learning of our own language[56]] is followed in the next bullet point by the argument that "los niños vascos tienen derecho a conocer la oscura historia de ETA" [Basque children have the right to know about the dark history of ETA]. Placing these statements one after the other implicitly folds them into the same discursive frame, with cultural recognition made to sit alongside the memory of terrorism. While no explicit connection is asserted, proximity and ordering suggest an association between the two, reinforcing suspicion of revitalisation measures and of the Basque language itself.

8.3.2.4 Sumar

Sumar's 2024 manifesto frames Basque through a discourse of rights, inclusion, and revitalisation. Consistent with that framing, it describes the language as the "eje central"

[56] See Chapter 6 for an explanation of *lengua propia*.

[central axis] of the plurilingual education model (Sumar, 2024, p. 37). This establishes Basque as the reference point that gives the model coherence, with other languages (including Castilian) positioned in relation to it.

The pledge “reconoceremos oficialmente la diversidad de conocimientos lingüísticos… perfiles solamente orales…” [we will officially recognise diverse linguistic competences… oral-only profiles…] (p. 109) works to reconfigure the boundaries of legitimate language use. Proficiency is cast not as a binary of fluency versus deficiency but as a spectrum of socially valid repertoires. The category “perfiles solamente orales” legitimises oral competence in its own right, detaching linguistic value from literacy and easing access for adult learners and new speakers who may not acquire full written command. Taken together, these discursive choices dilute traditional hierarchies of competence and expand the imagined community of Euskera speakers, aligning language policy with Sumar’s broader ethos of inclusion and social redistribution.

In sum, Sumar presents Basque as a transformative resource that is central and inclusive, matching the state-wide party’s plurinational and social justice-focused image, and (again) showing a relatively consistent line across state-wide and autonomous contexts. The conclusion now briefly situates this within the wider party landscape in the Basque Autonomous Community and in the state-wide debate.

8.4 Conclusion

In the Basque Autonomous Community parties adopt contrasting discursive strategies around the Basque language. The EAJ-PNV frames it through legality and administrative continuity, casting revitalisation as an incremental process aligned with good governance. EH Bildu, by contrast, draws on a narrative of institutional dysfunction to challenge the status quo, while advancing *euskaldunización* as both a measure of competence and an inclusive route to civic belonging. This framing expands the imagined speaker community yet re-centres hierarchy around Basque as the legitimate language of public life (RQ1). In comparative terms, EH Bildu resembles left of centre pro-independence forces in Catalonia and Galicia in tying

language to broader projects of societal transformation. The PNV, meanwhile, aligns less with other SSNPs due to its low-temperature register and message of continuity through incremental normalisation (RQ2).

As for state-wide actors, the PSE-EE balances broad support for Basque with opposition to language requirements. This allows the party to position itself in the electoral centre by triangulating between SSNPs' expansionary ambitions and the more restrictive stance of VOX and the PP. The PP provides a more developed and explicit line on language than its state-level counterpart, portraying the necessity of Basque promotion as exaggerated, thereby legitimising the watering down of language policy under the guise of fairness. Sumar's emphasis on inclusion is relatively consistent with its plurinational state-level discourse, while VOX's strategy of conflating language with separatism also closely tracks its rhetoric elsewhere. (RQ1 + RQ2).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that linguistic hierarchy in the BAC is reproduced through two parallel mechanisms. On one hand, managerial discourses naturalise incrementalism and present revitalisation as inevitable but remove its political urgency, consolidating hierarchy through routinisation. On the other hand, narratives that cast Basque as a threat or as government overreach position the language as partisan, exposing revitalisation to politicisation and delegitimisation. EH Bildu contests these dynamics by resignifying Basque as an integrative civic right. However, as with the BNG, this risks inviting associations with separatist politics, and, unique to EH Bildu, with memories of political violence through remnants of the 'everything was ETA'[57] mentality. (RQ3).

[57] See, among others, Whitfield (2015) on this.

9. Conclusion

This thesis asked how and why Spain's minoritised languages became more intensively politicised during and after the 2023 general elections, and what this reveals about shifting language ideologies and hierarchies. Using the Discourse-Historical Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, it linked textual strategies to socio-historical context, tracing how manifestos, parliamentary debates, and regional campaigns discursively constructed speakers, codes, and linguistic rights. Across these different scales of analysis, politicisation emerged as a reframing of long-standing tensions embedded in the unequal settlement of Article 3 of the 1978 Constitution. This politicisation was intensified as language became bound up in coalition negotiations, Congressional and Senate debates, and representations to the EU, becoming explicitly associated with specific parties and ideologies on the national stage. Analysis revealed how language became central to broader conflicts over sovereignty, legitimacy, and belonging, showing that multilingualism is not simply a background condition of Spanish politics but a constitutive site of ideological struggle.

RQ1 asked how languages were discursively constructed at state-wide and regional levels. While in its 23J manifesto the PSOE frames co-official languages primarily as potential sources of profit, following the election this discourse shifts to an open embrace of inclusive institutional multilingualism. The PP maintains relative silence in its 2023 programme, taking a more ideologically hostile approach in Congress, and particularly in the Senate. VOX discusses minoritised languages in terms of threat and waste, showing little change in rhetoric across settings. Sumar, by contrast, advances a discourse of linguistic justice, framing redistribution of rights and obligations as necessary to rebalance hierarchy. At the regional level, sub-state nationalist parties, while differing in certain aspects, cast co-official languages as enforceable civic rights and markers of political community. Interestingly, however, SWPs such as VOX did as much to tie language to separatism as any of the SSNPs themselves.

RQ2 explored how these framings were recontextualised across Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Autonomous Community. Parties appear to adapt their discourse based on their current and historical relation to power across communities, as well as to the unique

sociolinguistic landscape of each region. Where the Socialists govern (state-wide and in Catalonia), their rhetoric is pro-minoritised languages, yet in Galicia, where the party is in third place, Galician is barely mentioned. The PPdeG, who are dominant, in Galicia adopt a softer tone on language, than for example the PP in the BAC which opposes proposed revitalisation efforts on the basis of freedom of choice. The ideological poles, represented by Sumar and VOX are the most ideologically consistent across regions, maintaining the discourses described above largely irrespective of setting. For SSNPs there is a shared baseline of expanding the use of co-official languages in public life, with variation in how strongly obligation and constitutional questions are foregrounded. The three centre-left SSNPs studied (BNG, ERC, EH Bildu) use similar rhetoric of inclusion and rights, which is, to an extent, echoed by Junts, which puts its' main focus on the constitution. Other SSNPs are less similar, with the CUP weaving language into a broader critique of the neoliberal order, Aliança Catalana using it as a tool of exclusion, and the PNV focusing on governance and incremental normalisation.

RQ3 asked what these discourses reveal about the reproduction or disruption of linguistic hierarchies and symbolic power in the Spanish state. In essence, they show that hierarchy endures when Castilian is treated as the unmarked common language, when recognition is largely symbolic, when duties are left to individual speakers rather than institutions, and when minoritised claims are dismissed as partisan, excessive, or purely performative. Hierarchy is challenged when co-official languages are framed as everyday civic infrastructure, when rights are paired with enforceable obligations and budgets, when institutional use is normalised across arenas, and when the rhetoric of neutrality is exposed as ideological work. Recognition on its own is often not enough to disrupt the status quo, while policy and legal guarantees can shift the burden of revitalisation from communities to institutions. In short, the landscape is one of ongoing struggle in which symbolic power shifts only when discourse is coupled to material provision and institutional responsibility.

Furthermore, across the text the proposed diagram of linguistic hierarchy set out in section 2.1.2 proves overly simplistic. Regions are embedded in overlapping, nested hierarchies that interact in different ways and shift over time, and these interactions feed back into the state-wide order. Labels as suggested also compress important distinctions, for example the position of new speakers. Future work will refine the model to capture these multi-level dynamics and the internal differentiation of speaker categories.

In sum, while linguistic hierarchy has long been an entrenched feature of Spanish society, the period since 2023 has highlighted the role of party politics in its reproduction and contestation. While this thesis has looked at this from a top-down perspective, there is still work to be done from an ethnographic perspective. This will be the focus of future study.

Appendix

This appendix contains the corpus of texts analysed in the thesis, with a primary emphasis on party manifestos. A wider range of documents was initially collected, but the final corpus was refined during editing to concentrate on manifestos and to ensure compliance with the overall word-count.

Spain wide:

PP. (2023). *Programa Electoral. Un Proyecto al Servicio de Un Gran País. 365 Medidas*. PP. https://www.pp.es/sites/default/files/documentos/programa_electoral_pp_23j_feijoo_2023.pdf

PSOE. (2023). *Programa Electoral Elecciones Generales 23 Julio 2023*. PSOE. https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2023/07/PROGRAMA_ELECTORAL- GENERALES-2023.pdf

Sumar. (2023). *Un Programa Por Ti*. Sumar. https://movimientosumar.es/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Un-Programa-para-ti.pdf

VOX. (2023). *Un Programa Para Lo Que Importa*. VOX. www.votaabascal.es

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Cortes Generales . (2025). *Diario de Sesiones del Senado: Pleno, XV Legislatura, núm. 85*. https://www.senado.es/legis15/publicaciones/pdf/senado/ds/DS_P_15_85.PDF

Catalonia:

Comuns Sumar. (2024). *La Catalunya que ve*. Comuns Sumar. https://comuns.cat/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/comuns-programa-parlament-2024.pdf

VOX. (2024). *En Defensa Propia: ¡Para que Cataluña vuelva a ser Cataluña!* VOX. https://img.beteve.cat/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/programa-electoral-vox-eleccions-catalunya-2024-060524.pdf

PSC. (2024). *Força per governar*. PSC. https://www.socialistes.cat/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Programa-electoral-PSC-Eleccions-12-maig-2024.pdf

PPC. (2024). *Volem una Catalunya de Primera*. PPC. https://img.beteve.cat/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/programa-electoral-pp-eleccions-catalunya-2024-060524.pdf

Junts +. (2024). *Program de govern: Un nou començament, la legislatura de la represa*. Junts +. https://carlespuigdemont.cat/programa-electoral/

ERC. (2024). *Al Costat De La Gent, Al Costat De Catalunya*. ERC. https://esquerrarepublicana.cat/documents/c2024-programa.pdf

Aliança Catalana. (2024). *Què proposa Aliança Catalana?* Aliança Catalana. https://aliancacatalana.cat/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Programa-electoral-2024.pdf

CUP. (2024). *Defensem la terra* . CUP. https://img.beteve.cat/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/programa-cup-eleccions-catalunya-2024-laia-estrada-060524.pdf

Galicia:

PPdeG. (2024). *A Galicia que funciona* . PPdeG. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_gallegas_2024/programa_electoral_pp.pdf

BNG. (2024). *A Galiza que queres*. BNG. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_gallegas_2024/programa_electoral_bng.pdf

PSdeG. (2024). *Medidas para o cambio real en galicia* . PSdeG. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_gallegas_2024/programa_electoral_psdeg_psoe.pdf

Basque Autonomous Community:

EAJ-PNV. (2024). *Aukeratu Euskadi: Elige Bienestar* . EAJ-PNV. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_vascas_2024/programa_electoral_pnv.pdf

EH Bildu. (2024). *Programa de Gobierno* . EH Bildu. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_vascas_2024/programa_electoral_bildu.pdf

PSE-EE. (2024). *Cambia el guion: Aldatu bidea*. PSE-EE. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_vascas_2024/programa_electoral_psoe.pdf

PP Vasco. (2024). *Ireki: Abiertos*. PP Vasco. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_vascas_2024/programa_electoral_pp.pdf

VOX. (2024). *Sabes que es verdad*. VOX. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_vascas_2024/programa_electoral_vox.pdf

Sumar. (2024). *Un programa para una nueva Euskadi*. Sumar. https://www.rtve.es/contenidos/documentos/elecciones_vascas_2024/programa_electoral_sumar.pdf

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