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ARTICLE

Anticipating the future, escaping the past: Multilingual Spanish mothers at the crossroads of multiple transitions

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Abstract

This article discusses the family language biographies of two Spanish-Catalan speaking, white middle-class mothers living in Catalonia, who raise their children in English. The rationale behind their choice is informed by the mothers' experiences when trying to learn English as young adults in the late 1980s, mediated by their present socioeconomic conditions. In order to lay the groundwork for what is framed as a 'good' future for their children, these mothers embark upon a course of action designed to expose their children to English. The analysis, drawing upon a language biography approach and social positioning, reveals the role of parents' pasts for the construction of the future. Beyond the widely understood tropes regarding the commodification of English within neoliberalism, the families' actions reveal ideologies and future orientations informed by a complex interplay of historical, political, and economic factors wherein speaking English has become one of the markers of social access. (Family language biographies, Catalan children raised in English, anticipation, futurity)

Introduction

For the past sixteen years, a growing 'English fever' has captivated the imaginations of Spanish and Catalan families. The widespread expansion of language academies, English courses, extracurricular activities, and, more recently, immersion programmes—undertaken despite various challenges—are reshaping the linguistic repertoire of a country historically known for its struggle with English proficiency (Codó 2023; Patiño-Santos & Poveda 2023; Relaño-Pastor 2024). Notably, similar to what Park (2009a,b) reports for South Korea, English has increasingly become a marker of social class. It is no longer just elite families who view English as essential; working- and middle-class families with aspirations for upward mobility now see English as a key to their children's future success. According to media reports, this trend intensified after the 2008 economic crisis (Sandri 2019), which drove a generation of well-educated young Spaniards to migrate to other parts of Europe, particularly the UK, reinforcing the idea that English is a vital tool for

success. While this recent history motivates many parents today to invest in English education for their children, the biographies we collected reveal that parents recall and interpret the past in diverse ways when explaining their language ideologies and practices.

Considerable literature on Family Language Policy (FLP hereafter) demonstrates how parents' aspirations motivate them to act in particular ways (e.g. King & Fogle 2006; Hua & Li Wei 2016; da Costa Cabral 2018; Alipour, Khorshidi, & Hashemian 2023), but it is generally assumed to reflect prevailing neoliberal ideologies and is not typically discussed in relation to parents' recollections of their own pasts. These experiences have been collected through semistructured interviews and surveys, which present the past as something fixed and, to our view, do not allow us to understand the complexities of the trajectories of the parents, or the nuanced and dynamic ways in which the past is mobilised for present and future family plans, mediated by their socioeconomic conditions. We aim to contribute to this body of knowledge by taking a biographical approach in order to investigate the role of parents' (sometimes difficult) pasts in the development of present and future family language biographies. This approach is uniquely valuable as it elucidates participants' intentions and experiences, data which are not otherwise accessible (Busch 2016; Obojska & Purkarthofer 2018). Specifically, we focus on the ways in which two white middle-class, Spanish, multilingual mothers in Catalonia recall and construct rationales, based on their previous personal experiences with English, for raising their children at home in English, rather than in the languages of the region: Catalan and Spanish.

Attention to the notion of temporality, more precisely *futurity*, in cultural anthropology (Bryant & Knight 2019) has demonstrated that people's future orientations do not develop in a vacuum. They are the result of individuals' past experiences shaped by present socioeconomic and historical structures. What human beings hope for, expect, fear, or desire depends on the situated social and material conditions under which they have been raised or socialised. We consider that these experiences act as instances of memory that inform parents' future orientations and decision-making processes regarding their children's education.

The family language biographies studied here come from a broader critical ethnographic study about FLP (ENIFALPO ID2019-106710GB-I00)[1] concerned with the increased interest of Catalan parents, of all social classes, in their children being educated in English. The situation, described by Codó, echoing Park, as a social anxiety or *English fever* (Patiño-Santos 2016; Codó 2021; Patiño-Santos & Poveda 2023), places parents under pressure to maximise the opportunities for their children to learn English. Language immersion as best practice is the dominant ideology and is materialised in practices, according to parents' socioeconomic possibilities (Codó & Sunyol 2024). Thus, parents from upper-middle-class backgrounds might choose to send their children to elite schools or to boarding schools for a year abroad (McDaid 2020; Sunyol 2021). For middle-class parents, who enroll their children in state education, learning English at school is not enough. Immersion in these cases is exercised by combining short stays abroad, normally during the holidays, with what we have called 'immersion at home'. This entails creating an English-speaking environment for the children to practise their language skills without going abroad. These families tend to adopt strategies, such as making family groups with the

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children of British expats, who normally speak the English varieties coming from regions recognised as 'authentic', such as the UK, the US, or Australia.[2] This article engages with immersion during home-based activities, by exploring the parents' reasoning for their courses of actions. For historical reasons that are discussed below, in Catalonia, language uses have been vested with differential values. In the case of the group of parents we have been investigating, the choice of a language in which to raise their children is informed by complex processes of socioeconomic change, past and present, in Catalan society, intertwined with the personal stories of these parents. We claim that these mothers' pasts, as young women of a society in economic, political, and cultural transition during the 1980s and 1990s, inform their current dispositions, language ideologies, and language practices, which they aim to transmit to their children. We situate our work within the latest developments of FLP, which distance themselves from Spolsky's (2004) model and call for biographical and ethnographical approaches. In tune with them, we adopt an anthropological view of *future* that understands its study through a set of (affective) future orientations that individuals enact in their everyday lives (Bryant & Knight 2019). In particular, we focus on the ways in which two bilingual Catalan-Spanish mothers, from a group of five families in Metropolitan Barcelona, construct their expectations and forms of anticipation in the plans that they make for their children. Based on their negative experiences of trying to learn the English language as adults, they engage in sophisticated plans to ensure that their children are raised in English, a language that is not used in the everyday lives of others in these children's environment (members of their extended families, the school, or the neighbourhood). The only way to imagine the future is to draw on what our experience reveals (Bryant & Knight 2019).

English and the Europeanisation of Spain: The conditions for an imagined global future

After a long period of isolation resulting from the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939–1975), Spain started a process of Europeanisation under the centre-left socialist government of Felipe González (1982–1996). The political democratisation that started in 1976, and the entrance of Spain into the EEC (European Union) in 1985, would bring profound social, economic, and political transformations. According to Noguera, Castro Martin, & Soro Bonmati (2005), an economic rise of the service sector, mainly administration and tourism, to the detriment of the agrarian and manufacturing sectors, coincided 'with a substantial rise of the economically active population, due to the entry into the labor market of larger birth cohorts and to the increase in women's labor force participation' (2005:373). This was related to the important expansion of women's education, which was supported by laws that granted certain rights, such as divorce, along with the rise of feminist movements (Jones 1997). The democratic access to education initiated with the LODE[3] (1985), which would be strengthened with the LOGSE[4] (1990), would also open up possibilities for the younger generation of the 1990s to access secondary and higher education, despite class boundaries. It is in this period that English replaced French as the preferred foreign language of the basic education system. As reported by scholars of that time: 'In a decade in which Spanish society expressed its desire to

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catch up with modernity, the English language was consolidated as one of the basic instruments for opening up to a new status that took the eyes of Spaniards away from our local reality in search of new European horizons, horizons that were already felt as their own'[5] (Barbero, Gutiérrez Almarza, & Beltrán Llavador 1995:138). English symbolised modernisation, openness, and was seen as an instrument of cultural, economic, and social participation in an international market. The same studies highlighted that the interest in English was materialised in the implementation of audio-oral English-teaching methods in the education system and the proliferation of language academies to fulfil the emergent desire to learn English (see Barbero et al. 1995). On a broader scale, the participation of Spain in the Schengen treaty from 1992 guaranteed free movement to many other European countries as citizens with equal rights to work. More recently, the 1999 Bologna agreement consolidated the right of young Spanish people to travel abroad for educational purposes. The Spanish higher education system, although it had still not adopted English as a key subject, started to send its first students on exchange programmes such as *Erasmus*. All of these historical and sociopolitical changes were experienced by the parents who participated in our research.

From a bilingual national project to an 'English fever' in Catalonia

Catalonia, like the other autonomous regions in Spain, was not exempt from those socioeconomic and educational transformations. Represented as a bilingual region where Catalan and Spanish coexist, Catalonia saw a resurgence of Catalan as a key element of its national identity after the transition. The process of normalising Catalan (Normalització Lingüística) aimed to recover the role of this language in official spaces, the education system and the media, as well as making it the everyday language (*llengua habitual*). This status had been diminished during Franco's regime, further complicated by the influx of monolingual Spanish-speaking migrants from other Spanish regions during the 1960s and 1970s, often referred to as the 'second generation of migrants'. During the 1980s and 1990s, the education system focussed on ensuring that all children in Catalonia learned Catalan and facilitated social integration for those whose 'habitual' language was Spanish. This mission was going to become more complex with the arrival of international migrants, speakers of languages other than Spanish (mostly Arabic and Chinese), as well as other varieties of Spanish from former Latin American colonies, as a result of the participation of Catalonia and Spain in the globalised economy at the end of the twentieth century. Concurrently, there was a growing interest in learning English, a previously less emphasised aspect of education in Spain. Codó (2021) describes this period as marked by the emergence of CLIL (content and language integrated learning) initiatives in private and semiprivate (*concertada*) schools and a surge in English language academies. State education began adopting measures to promote English among children from lower-middle- and working-class families who could not access private education. This 'English fever' peaked during the economic crisis of 2008.

Over nearly fifty years of democratic governance, Catalonia's language ideologies have evolved. Initially centred on Catalan as the region's 'own language', and the main priority of its normalisation, the focus has shifted towards promoting

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intercultural cohesion and recognising the diverse linguistic backgrounds of Catalan residents. Today, Catalonia exhibits a range of language ideologies and practices, reflecting different perspectives on language use (Newman & Trenchs-Parera 2015). Broadly speaking, and without claiming to be exhaustive, Catalan speakers fall into a number of categories: We can find Catalan speakers who view Catalan as their own language, as opposed to Spanish, which they perceive as imposed by the Spanish government. Another group of Catalan speakers continues to accommodate by switching to Spanish in front of perceived Spanish speakers, a traditional practice in Catalonia (Woolard 2013). Additionally, some Catalan speakers, raised as Spanish speakers but educated in Catalan, identify as bilingual and alternate between the two languages. Meanwhile, residents who use Spanish as their primary language, and more recently, those who speak other languages, see learning Catalan as a means of integration.

As this brief discussion shows, generalising about the Catalan language and language ideologies overlooks the complexities involved. The survey of language use by the local Catalan government (Generalitat de Catalunya 2019), launched in 2018, identified multiple orientations towards the Catalan language amongst resident Catalans. The results indicate that, between 2013 and 2018, the use of Catalan amongst adults increased slightly. More than one-third of Catalan residents were born outside Catalonia, but Catalan is used in their everyday lives, in addition to their first languages (including Spanish, English, Arabic, Chinese, and others). The use of Catalan has extended to public spaces in shops, and in private spaces, such as between friends and neighbours. The migrant adults see a value in learning Catalan for various reasons (intercultural marriages, social networks, work circumstances, etc). Importantly, the intergenerational transmission of Catalan in the family continues to be strong. While the local government focusses on Catalan, the media continue to transmit an anxiety amongst Catalans over having an insufficient level of English (Silva 2024). The parents we have studied have ambivalent ideas on this. They are all fully bilingual in Spanish and Catalan, and they all interact in both languages in their daily lives. However, they embrace new forms of household relations in which English is incorporated as one of the family's linguistic repertoires. For them, English represents a language of international engagement and mobility, which is why they are keen for their children to learn it. More interestingly, as discussed by Codó & Sunyol (2024:18), they are the kind of parents who embrace new forms of parental culture, whereby they choose to teach their children English as a means of 'actively taking charge of their children's education through informed and calculated choices, enabling them to manage the family's educational investments efficiently in order to maximise their socioeconomic, educational, and professional return'.

A biographical approach to the study of temporality and materialities for the shaping of FLP

The evolution of FLP research

The field of FLP has its roots in language policy research, and at its inception merged knowledge from the domains of language socialisation, (children's) language acquisition, and language maintenance/language shift (Lanza & Lomeu Gomes 2020).

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In its early phase, FLP was dominated by Spolsky's (2004) framework, which identified the three elements of language policy: language ideologies, language management, and language practices. Accordingly, early FLP research focussed upon identifying causal relationships between those three elements and language outcomes. It primarily considered the strategies that migrant parents used to maintain their heritage language (Li Wei 2012; Stavans 2012; Curdt-Christiansen 2013; Ren & Hu 2013). Parents had to deal with the tensions that they and their children perceived between the language used at home and the language of school, and in their society more broadly. As King & Fogle (2008, 2013) noted, bilingual parenting was 'good' parenting. Parents navigated between socialising the language of society, in order to give their children the social capital for success, and their personal/cultural attachments to their heritage language(s). Those often-conflicting motivations have been labelled 'profit' and 'pride' respectively in the work of Heller & Duchêne (2012), and of those who have aligned themselves with their work. As Muth & Ryazanova-Clarke (2017) observed, the shift to 'profit' did not fully replace the 'pride' discourse of language, and the important symbolic role it held for many. Within this body of research were a significant number of studies that placed the role of heritage language maintenance within the family sphere (Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi 2013; Ó hIfearnáin 2013; Soehl 2016), whilst the economically important prestige languages were developed through access to formal education/schooling (Sunyol & Codó 2019; Bae & Park 2020). More recently, the focus has expanded to include a consideration of how parents from non-English-speaking contexts take ownership of their children's access to English, believing it to be important for their future success. (Patiño-Santos 2018; Patiño-Santos & Poveda 2023).

FLP research evolved to include how language ideologies are formed, and which ones pervade different societies and inform families' language practices and strategies (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Song 2010; Bae 2015). Latterly, the research focus has developed again to include notions of meaning making, biography, agency, and identity (Curdt-Christiansen 2018). As Lanza (2021) identified, FLP studies have kept pace with broader shifts in sociolinguistic research into multilingualism, which include the need to understand the social, cultural, and linguistic changes that result from the post-modern globalised context. Accordingly, recent studies, such as those by King & Lanza (2019), Lanza & Curdt-Christiansen (2018), and Van Mensel (2018), have moved the conversation in FLP on from a consideration of only language outcomes as they relate to Spolsky's model, to an exploration of 'language-mediated experiences within the family' (Van Mensel & De Meulder 2021:695). With this shifting focus has come a growing diversity in research methods. Several scholars have called for the increased use of ethnographic approaches in FLP research, whilst noting that most FLP studies continue to base their findings upon survey and interview (Purkarthofer 2019; Lanza 2021; Van Mensel & De Meulder 2021; Mansfield 2022). Moreover, as Hirsch & Lee (2018) and Lanza & Lomeu Gomes (2020) noted, in order to meet this new phase of research goals, FLP studies must now consider the temporal aspect of the family, suggesting an ethnographic and/or biographical approach. Thus, for example, Obojska & Purkarthofer (2018) identified how the trajectories, (language) biographies, and narratives of the pasts of families and family members inform their relationship with language(s), and their perception of the extent and nature of its value. Whilst these works demonstrated the value of looking back, the work of Bryant & Knight (2019) (also Patiño-Santos & Poveda 2023) looked forward,

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showing how an understanding of the future, be that desired, aspired to, or feared, powerfully impacts the (language) ideologies and hence the practices of the present. This approach allows for an exploration of the emotional and affective dimensions of FLP, an area that remains notably understudied (but see Tannenbaum 2012; Obojska & Purkarthofer 2018).

Futurity in parents' biographical accounts

A biographical view foregrounds the value of storytelling for narrators. By narrating their lives, the tellers recall important past events that have shaped their present and future courses of action across time, but also the meaning attached to them. Through the process of narrating, the social actors offer an understanding of their present circumstances, informed by past experiences, and a rationale for their decisions to engage with imagined 'better' futures. As noted by Purkarthofer (2022:50), 'By analysing individual life stories, effects of social processes that are relevant in structuring people's lives and experiences emerge. Moments of biographical transformations, which comprise not only migration but also changes in occupation or work environment as well as parenthood or serious illness, make the effects of social forces visible and highlight power relations in societies'. In their work *Anthropology of Future*, Bryant & Knight (2019) discuss how concern about an (uncertain) future, leads social actors to project themselves towards particular imagined futures. Their ideas about the future can be captured as *future orientations*, such as anticipation, expectation, aspiration, and hope that allow us to understand their different courses of action. Such future orientations are shaped by their lived experience, so by focussing on these, and what people do to realise an imagined future, we can understand human agency over time (Bryant & Knight 2019; Cook & Woodman 2020). As studies on historical memory have foregrounded, by looking into the past, we can learn how things have come to be (Stewart 2016), and how people envision a future 'good life'. The imagined future—what we anticipate, dream of, long for—acts as a way to legitimate the present, but also 'to radically shake our understandings of the past and to remake [our] identity in the present' (Bryant & Knight 2019:13). Thus, for example, in her studies about Greeks' perceptions in the aftermath of the economic recession of 2008, Bryant (2018) found that the feelings of being immersed in 'the uncanny present' obliged people to rethink their difficult past in different ways. The fear of 'repetition' or 'return' to difficult pasts created different experiences of the present and hence orientations towards the future. 'While repetition implies taking lessons from the past, but more importantly shaping our comportment and intentionality towards the future, return instead implies the past as a type of haunting of the present, where uncanniness arises not from intentionality but from the past's unpredictability in relation to the future' (2018:29). Importantly, social actors experience temporality individually and collectively, characterised by the author as a 'vernacular timescale', where cohorts of people experiencing similar present or past events orientate themselves similarly towards the future. Vernacular timescales are expressed in times such as 'time for war' or 'time of crisis'. In the particular case of this article, we discuss 'times of transition'.

Here, we focus on two future orientations, 'expectation' and 'anticipation', which emerged in the stories collected during our fieldwork. The two notions are closely related, but Bryant & Knight (2019) draw a heuristic distinction between them, in

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the sense that they mobilise different courses of action. Using the example of rain, they claim that when we expect rain, we carry an umbrella with us. This expectation may be 'viewed as a conservative teleology, one that gives thickness to the present through its reliance on the past. To anticipate rain, however, is to feel and smell it in the air, to close one's windows and cover lawn furniture while imagining the future in the present. Anticipation slims the present, often breaking entirely with the past as it draws present and future into the same activity timespace' (2019:22). Amongst other things, for social actors, this entails actors modifying their practices, reorganising their lives, and engaging in a continual assessment of their actions. Such reflections have allowed us to believe that the families in our study, led mainly by the mothers, invest in their children's English learning as a form of anticipation, but also of hope for the future.

Nevertheless, we would like to underline that the social, historical, and material conditions under which these mothers exist play a central role, not only in the ways in which they call upon past experiences, but also in the possibilities that they perceive as available to them in the future. What these mothers anticipate, expect, hope for, and dream about is shaped by their current social positioning and the dispositions they have acquired and reconfigured across time and space. For the mothers, the imagined futures of their daughters need to encompass all the possibilities and opportunities that either they did not themselves enjoy in the past and/or that they constructed over the course of their lives, under their particular social and economic conditions.

Doing virtual fieldwork with multilingual families

The data for this article come from the ENIFALPO project, as described above. Our fieldwork was conducted between February 2021 and November 2022. Due to the pandemic, we transitioned the fieldwork to a virtual format, which enabled us to access online drama lessons. Seven children from six multilingual families participated, including the daughter of one of the researchers. Five families were located in different parts of Barcelona, one researcher and the tutor were based in different parts of the UK. The lessons were held every Tuesday evening from 5:00 to 7:00 for over a year.

All families agreed to participate, identifying with the researchers who were also raising their children bilingually—one speaking Spanish, Catalan, and English, and the other English, French, and Italian. The participants were eager to exchange tips and strategies for maintaining multilingualism, particularly in languages not used in their local mainstream contexts: English for the families in Catalonia, and Spanish and French for the researchers' families in the UK. Fieldwork spanned over twenty-one months, using Zoom and WhatsApp as the primary platforms. Notably, the families viewed the fieldwork as an opportunity to practise English in an informal setting. Whilst, in common with the participant, Adriana was a native Spanish speaker, Marie-Anne, as a native English speaker, was perhaps perceived as being less familiar with the participants' situation and therefore requiring more detailed information, which caused them to open up and give us unique access to language ideologies and personal insights into the challenges of raising bilingual children in Catalonia. All of our data collection was characterised by a continual reflexivity (Patiño-Santos 2019).

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In total, we collected data from four families, including six drama lesson observations, 4.5 hours of individual conversations with the mothers, five hours of conversations with the families, and a series of forty-minute videos produced by the children discussing their favourite spaces at home. Additionally, we recorded two hours of interactions among the children, discussing language ideologies, practices, and their videos, along with artefacts produced by the children in their free time, such as poems, drawings, along with the books they were reading. For this article, we focus on two families (Pilar's and Reme's), since they best illustrate the findings we aim to explore.

We define this study as a virtual ethnography, applying traditional ethnographic methods to online social spaces (Hine 2000). The field site we constructed was neither purely geographical nor exclusively online. Rather, we treated the participants' virtual presence and online interactions as contiguous with and embedded in their broader social contexts (Burrell 2009). Our fieldwork and analysis aimed to capture the biographical construction of data in real-time, informed by the participants' experiences and perspectives. The primary method of inquiry was online participant observation, with a central focus on the storytelling of family histories—past, present, and future. The researchers facilitated these conversations, encouraging participants to share stories, which were often co-constructed among the mothers, their children, and the researchers themselves.

Our analysis focuses on the reconstruction of the (language) biographies (Busch 2016) of each family with special attention to the mothers' accounts. Since the mothers of these families lead the transmission and foment the creation of a home-based immersion in English, they become the most important managers for the language ideologies and practices at home. Each portrayal includes the mothers' trajectories, and is situated vis-à-vis the historical accounts described above, the current socioeconomic conditions under which these families live, and their language practices at home. The reconstructed biographies are interleaved with small stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008:127), which reveal the ways in which the mothers construct what they consider to be a 'good future' for their children—that is, the ways in which they construct 'expectation' and 'anticipation' in their everyday stories, linked to their past experiences. Social positioning as 'a primary means by which subjects are produced and subjectivity forms', as seen by Holland & Leander (2004), allows us to recognise that it is through our past experiences, which we have positioned in particular ways, that we have constructed such subjectivities. These, in turn, might be transmitted to, or challenged by, our children.

Multilingual family biographies

The analysis focusses on the family (language) biographies of Pilar and Reme that we reconstructed, based on the time we spent with them, our informal conversations on WhatsApp, and the interviews conducted with them and their families. In the analysis, we pay special attention to the meaning that they give to English in their lives. Both women, in their late forties, experienced the transition to democracy in Spain and the country's consequent 'europeanisation'. Their desire to learn English as young women in the 1980s emerges in their stories as a turning point in their lives. It is precisely these memories that legitimise all of the courses of action that they adopt to educate their daughters towards particular orientations and

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dispositions. English as the 'key to the future', shapes their expectations and forms of anticipation.

Pilar: Breaking with the past

Pilar, a psychologist in her late forties, is a mother of two girls, Marta and Ester, and is married to Pablo. Both are public employees with professional, well-paid jobs, guaranteed for life, which allows them to engage in a comfortable life of travelling together to other parts of Europe during their holidays or to pay for extracurricular activities for their children. The girls attend a state school where, as explained above, instruction is expected to take place in Catalan, while Spanish is normally reserved for social relations at school. Even though both parents speak Catalan and Spanish, Spanish being Pilar's first language, she nevertheless decided to raise her daughters in English. In our online conversations, she produced all the tropes about English that circulate in non-English-speaking countries, as revealed by the literature (Park 2009a; Sayer 2017; Patiño-Santos & Poveda 2023). By following a neoliberal logic, English is portrayed as the language of the future and of economic opportunity (Wee 2006; Shin 2015), so this is what she wants for her daughters. Pilar does not miss any opportunity for her daughters to practise English and does not skimp on resources to create an environment that allows her daughters to be immersed in the language. Pilar learnt English as an adult. She was born and raised in a Madrilenian family, of Andalusian background, during the 1970s, the years of the Spanish transition. Pilar recalls that English was not an important subject at school, nor in higher education when she was a university student in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, she recounted memories of her early interest in English. She described a desire to pursue a family story about the origin of her 'red hair', which explained that they had Irish ancestors who had settled in Andalusia at the beginning of the twentieth century, and a wish, as a young Spanish woman in the 1990s, to 'discover the world'. She went to Ireland, to work in a hotel, when she was around twenty-six with the ultimate aim of learning English. However, this experience turned out to be something of a reality check.

(1) "I thought I spoke English"

1 Marie-Anne: so, did you go [to Ireland] to try and trace your family of for curiosity of where your family had come from, or nothing to do with it?
2 Pilar: nothing to do with that/ I really wanted to learn English // it was really shocking because I thought I knew English until I went there@/ when I went there I realised I didn't manage to- to get people to understand me/it was far more::-/ it was very different than in in school like in school is very formal/you know/ all the structures well-constructed/it was more like 'hi'@@

In this small story, Pilar constructs her early experiences in an English-speaking country, as 'shocking'. Through the events that she recalls, we can understand that her surprise lies in the fact that she positions herself in the story as a non-English speaker abroad, even though she had studied English at school. Importantly, she

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reflects upon this mismatch between her expectations and the reality she experienced by drawing on the comparison between the English she learnt at school and the English used in everyday life in Ireland. She contrasts the English learnt at school, with its formality and well-constructed structures, with the informal English, through which she failed to communicate in Ireland. This testimony reveals how English was taught in the 1990s. It focussed more on the grammatical structures and vocabulary than on real communication (Barbero et al. 1995). As reported by other mothers, English at school was taught through the medium of Catalan. During our conversations, their disappointment with their own English learning at school emerged regularly. Pilar made clear that she left school unable to communicate in English, and, on two occasions, defined learning more informal English, which she encountered in Anglophone countries as an adult, as an "agony".

Importantly, and despite her difficulties, Pilar framed learning English as an "eye-opening" experience. Once she had learnt the language in Ireland, she gained the confidence to look for jobs requiring English language skills. With time she was able improve her job situation and started working as a Spanish teacher in Dublin. This led her to work in the UK, Indonesia, and Germany, before settling in Catalonia. In her biography, learning English is portrayed, not merely as an experience of speaking another language, but as a key asset to becoming what Benson & O'Reilly (2009) term a 'lifestyler'. Thanks to English, she was able to travel and experience other cultures. This assessment of the value of English was also expressed by the other research participants.

Once Pilar, now settled in Barcelona, became a mother of two girls, she decided to "save [her] children from that agony". Her past traumatic experience as an adult English learner led her to make the decision to anticipate her children's future and raise them in English. She felt it to be a kind of mission. For that reason, they put in place a set of rituals designed to socialise the girls in English: both girls communicate in English effectively as we could appreciate during our observations of the online drama lesson and the various activities that we organised with the families. One of the rituals established at home was the systematic language policy "Mum speaking English and Dad speaking Catalan". Since Spanish is the dominant language of their neighbourhood, according to Pilar: "that will come" unaided. The girls had been exposed to English through a series of activities dating back to when they were babies. They met up with other families and parents with a similar interest and created English singing groups and English days for other children's activities. Excerpt (2) illustrates the way in which Pilar describes her home language management.

(2) Home language management negotiation

Pilar: my decision was English // my husband in Catalan// (15:28) that was a kind of a fight// I tried him to to learn-/ he speaks English //he can manage in English but it was very hard on top of the hard-working day/ getting (tired)º trying to speak English. It was very hard for him// so we managed to do it during the holidays // so we had e:-/ at the beginning we had like two English weeks a year// we only could speak English and that was very good/that was very good/ everyone made a huge efforts .../we travelled a lot ...

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In this excerpt, Pilar reports the negotiation of the language policy at home. As is discussed in the literature (De Houwer & Bornstein 2016), it was the mother who decided the language use and was actively engaged in the language education of her children. Pilar's plans aimed to involve the whole family, but her husband is portrayed as not being as competent an English speaker who therefore cannot keep up with the family's activities in English. The different actions Pilar reports being put in place construct her as a committed mother who creates opportunities for the family to speak English: "during the holidays", "two weeks a year", and so on. Importantly, the portrayal of her husband as a busy man who cannot communicate in English as effectively, mirrors the "agony" she experienced herself back in Ireland when trying to communicate in English as an adult. This is constructed in the story as requiring a huge effort.

As a result of their family rituals, Marta, the elder daughter, communicates in English fluently and confidently. Ester, the younger one, unlike her sister, prefers not to display her English language skills in public. For that reason, her mother stopped talking exclusively to the girls in English a couple of years ago. Now the girls watch cartoons in English, and their mother continues to seek out activities run in English across the city and beyond. The virtual drama lesson in which we observed them, and the activities that we proposed to them, are among the activities in which she has enrolled the girls.

After several years of speaking to the girls exclusively in English, Pilar now rarely communicates with them in English. The girls have shown that they are advanced speakers, which makes her feel that her efforts have been rewarded. She feels that her daughters are able to communicate effectively in English, even speaking more fluently than their teachers at school. The following in (3) illustrates the results of Pilar's investment.

(3) Marta speaks English

Pilar: I can tell you a story/ We were in Scotland in a bus and there was an old lady// Marta was/maybe 6- 7 years old and it was very xx lady/she was sitting and Marta was more or less of her height and the lady says 'hello'/ and Marta said 'hello' and the lady said/ 'can you whistle?'/ and she said 'yes' (she whistles)/ 'but my mother can't/my sister can't either/she's very little'// and I 'oh! My daughter speaks English' @@@ a/ that was the first time I heard Marta to speak English/it was worth it @

Through this small story, Pilar aims to demonstrate her daughter's skills as an English speaker. This, for her, was the evidence to illustrate that her job as an English-speaking mother was done. Marta, on a bus in Scotland, is able to communicate successfully with a native-speaking interlocutor—an old lady. Pilar's recall of the situation, by voicing the dialogue between the old lady and Marta, indicates her daughter's high level of proficiency. Pilar's realisation that Marta speaks English ("that was the first time I heard Marta to speak English") confirmed that her task was complete, and hence her evaluation "it was worth it", which provides a happy ending to her story. This is in line with similar findings reported by Codó & Sunyol (2024).

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Pilar's family story illustrates how parents' pasts can influence their future orientations regarding their children's (language) education. Based on her experience of learning English as an adult, as an "agony", she anticipates a painless future for her daughter and takes extreme measures to bring this about: English was instituted as the home language, despite the fact that this might exclude their father. The sacrifice is seen as worth it, as Pilar demonstrates that she has fulfilled her ultimate expectations. In a way, Pilar sees the future she has anticipated in her children's linguistic skills: Marta can communicate in English effectively. Since she sees her job as done, she has relaxed the language policy at home, and she now speaks in Spanish to her daughters, while their father continues to speak to them in Catalan. We were able to witness this 'successful' intergenerational language change by speaking with Marta in English and appreciating her English skills when she interacted with our English-speaking children. Marta herself reproduced her mother's pride when she confirmed that she corrected her English teacher at school.

Reme's family: Forging a multilingual future

Remedios' (Reme's) family is Catalan, consisting of her husband Mario, and their daughter Lucía (11), who work for a multilingual international company as administrators. As in Pilar's case, their economic stability allows them to provide opportunities for the family to spend long holidays abroad and to enrol their daughter into some relatively costly extracurricular activities. Both parents are the children of members of the massive cohort of internal migrants (second generation migrants, as discussed above) who arrived during the 1960s, coming from Spanish-speaking areas. Spanish was the first language for both parents, while Catalan was learnt at school. According to their stories, in the late 1990s, when Remedios and Mario were in their twenties, they both felt they needed to have new experiences in life and decided to learn English. As in Pilar's testimony, they recall that "this was not common at that time". English was not as important in Catalonia as it is nowadays. Reme and Mario were not a couple at that time, but coincidentally both decided to travel from Barcelona to London. For Reme, the trip was initially intended to last one year. However, she, like Pilar, explains that, after learning English, she had a significant life-changing experience. She became interested in teaching English, and she travelled around Asia as an English language teacher, before returning to Barcelona. Her interest in travelling led her to work at the airport. Even though she works as an administrator, she states that the fact that she is in contact with passengers from all over the world makes her work interesting. At the airport she can practice the languages she has learnt over the course of her trips: English, French, and Turkish.

When Reme and Mario had their first child, she made the decision to raise her as a multilingual person.

(4) "She could speak English with me"

1 Adriana: How was this decision made? [the decision to raise Lucía in English]
2 Reme: It was when she was six months /– when she was three or four-/I wanted her to meet foreigners and I thought it was be nice to go somewhere for her to learn and it was when she was born really/ that I found groups

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> that they were doing things and then I decided when I found a group to stop working/ and when she was- /I don't know when she was – it was in the summer/to stop working and just be with her and do all these things because I thought/ maybe she can- I wanted to be with her // it was the main thing all the time@/ I wanted to share all this/ and then also I liked English and I thought she could learn English with me

In contrast to certain studies in FLP, which construct the 'good' mother based on her efforts to transmit the heritage language to her children (King & Fogle 2008), Reme positions herself as being a 'good' mother by furnishing them with English. However, it is only at the end of the story that we understand that her discursive construction of a 'good' mother entails socialising her new-born daughter in English. At the beginning of the excerpt, Reme lists a series of activities in which she planned to engage her baby daughter. Although it is not explicit, the coda to this story allows us to understand that the ultimate goal was to immerse her in an English-speaking environment, through meeting foreigners, learning English, and finding groups that "were doing something" (in English). She even reports creating a group herself and stopping working in order to be with her daughter, learning English together. She defines this decision as an aspect of sharing "all this" with her daughter, with the experience of learning English seen as part of "all this". Reme continued to be the primary carer at home with Lucía until she started her mid-primary school education.

As in Pilar's case, Reme began to organise trips abroad for the family in order to give Lucía the opportunity to interact with "native speakers". Thus, when Lucía was in preschool, the family took some leave and settled in the UK for five months. Reme and Mario wanted her to attend a UK school to learn English fluently.

(5) All for English

1 Reme:	She has a lot of English-speaking French- ehh- friends // so/for her we went out and she was speaking with the children // like a – like in a natural-/she went to an English school when she was young // I mean we moved to England for five months and then she was doing activities all the time // when we lived back for five months. … we went to many many activities // and then she did many things there // and after/it was reading because at the beginning we didn't have books but after/I found the way to find second hand books because they were exp-/ I wasn't working/ so I didn't have a lot of money so I didn't buy a lot books //so when we-/ I went to England I bought a lot of @@// I came back with a lot @@ // at the beginning I translated Spanish// I translated them myself// the Spanish books
2 Marie-Anne:	Wahoo!
3 Reme:	but sometimes it was not very/ I didn't translate it very well/ maybe/ I don't know

This excerpt illustrates the agency displayed by Reme in order to provide a suitable English-speaking environment for Lucía. First, the five months in the UK are recalled as "busy times". The reiteration of the determiner "many" to define the

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number of activities (and things) in which they engaged during this short period evokes the sensation that they were very active during this immersive experience. Second, Reme's agency can be appreciated as she positions herself as a resourceful mother in the story. The fact that they did not have enough money in the UK was not an obstacle to making Lucía a competent, literate child in English. At the beginning, Reme acted as a translator for her daughter by reading Spanish-written stories in English, but once Reme understood the British second-hand market, she managed to buy second-hand books in English for her daughter.

Nowadays, Lucía speaks in English with her mother, Spanish with her father, and Catalan at school. Within the Catalan context, where the Catalan language is seen as an important identity marker, Reme and Mario distance themselves from the discourses that vest speaking Catalan with this symbolic value. They mentioned to us that some parents look at them oddly when they speak English in public spaces. The following excerpt, collected in an interview with the whole family, illustrates the ways in which they contest discourses and actions that they perceive as criticisms.

(6) "They [the other parents] think we're snob"

1 Reme:	I think mostly/I meaan yeah/ I think they [other parents] admire it/ her English but they think we're a bit weird/
2 Lucía:	my friends don't think I'm weird! /maybe yours!
3 Reme [to Lucía]:	not you/ not you because it was not you the one who made the decision/ @@ I mean they think 'what is this?'/ 'you have to speak'/ what are...wuahh!
4 Mario:	when Lucía was two/ a mum in the park/ passed to Reme found a little piece of paper and written down *repipi only repipi* [= 'stuck-up']
5 Lucía:	what is *repipi*?
6 Reme:	that we are doing something that is snob
7 Mario:	she wrote it down in a paper this to her: 'OK/ don't be like that/ don't do that please'@
8 Adriana and Marie-Anne:	OOPS

In this example, Reme and Mario use the space of the interview with us for two purposes. The first is to report other parents' views about their FLP: English first, then Spanish or Catalan. In line 1 Reme defines the way in which they feel they are perceived by other parents as a paradox: "I think they [other parents] admire it/ her English but they think we're a bit weird/". Mario aligns with Reme's definition of the situation by introducing a small story in line 4. There, Mario recalls an incident in a park when Lucia was two. In the narrated world, Reme found a piece of paper upon which somebody had written *repipi*. This is interpreted by Mario in line 7, as a criticism of the fact that they speak to their little girl in English. His interpretation of *repipi* as "don't be like that" signals that those who circulated the note do not approve of their linguistic behaviour. We, the researchers, aligned ourselves with Mario's interpretation with an affiliative surprise in line 8.

Their second aim in this interaction is to use the space of the interview to socialise their daughter into recognising and contesting such criticisms. Thus, to

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her mother's explanation of the paradox in which they live: admired but criticised as "weird", Lucía distances herself from that assessment in line 2, clarifying that, unlike these adults, her friends do not find her "weird". Reme takes the opportunity in line 3 to explain to her daughter that she cannot be criticised because she did not make the decision to be raised in English. Reme takes full responsibility for her actions and exonerates Lucía. Again, in line 5, after Mario introduces the term *repipi* in his small story, Reme contests the implied criticism (line 6) in explaining to Lucía the meaning of that word: "we are doing something that is snob".

All in all, Lucía (age eleven) is very proud of her English skills. She is able to speak, read, and write to an advanced level. As in Marta's case above, Lucía corrects her teachers' English at the Catalan school. Reme and Mario feel that their mission is not yet accomplished, however. They want Lucía to learn more languages, so she is now learning French as an extracurricular activity. They want to equip their daughter with as many languages as possible.

Discussion and further thoughts

In this article, we have explored how white middle-class Catalan–Spanish-speaking families construct imagined futures through their language biographies, specifically in their decision to raise their children in English, the most prestigious foreign language in Catalonia. By focussing on temporality as an organising principle in these (language) biographies, we have shown how the past is mobilised as a strategic and affectively charged narrative that legitimises present actions and orientates families towards particular futures. These future-orientated practices are intimately shaped by the parents' current socioeconomic circumstances, which in turn frame prevailing ideas about what constitutes a 'good' or desirable future for their children. Through these accounts, we gain insight into how language ideologies and practices intersect with notions of 'good parenting', defined here as the pursuit of culturally valued practices aimed at securing children's future success.

Building on Bryant & Knight's (2019) work on temporality, we have approached the present not as a neutral or static point in time, but as a generative site where memories of the past and expectations of the future converge. It is within this present that parents articulate their agency, make sense of their trajectories, and engage in practices aimed at shaping their children's futures. Two interrelated processes emerged as central to understanding these dynamics. The first involves the production of a shared, collectively remembered historical period that structures how individuals position themselves in relation to time. In our case, the Spanish Transition to democracy (1978–1982?) was invoked by participants as a transformative moment in their lives. Reme, Pilar, and their husbands recalled how this sociopolitical shift opened up new opportunities for education, mobility, and self-development, particularly in contrast to the constraints faced by previous generations under Franco's regime.

These recollections are far from neutral. They are deeply classed and ideologically inflected, functioning as narratives of rupture and progress. For the mothers in our study, English became a potent symbol of this change, associated with higher education, independence, travel, and professional aspiration. It was not simply a language, but a marker of distinction (Bourdieu 1984) and a resource that indexed a new kind of modern, outward-looking subjectivity. These mothers framed English as 'the key

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to freedom', an emblem of what was newly possible for their generation, and what they now sought to extend, more seamlessly, to their children.

The second process we examined concerns parents' orientations towards the future, and how these are shaped by and in turn shape family language practices. We focussed in particular on the affective and strategic dispositions of 'expectation' and 'anticipation'. Although often used interchangeably, we drew on Bryant & Knight's (2019) heuristic distinction to argue that they give rise to different teleological frameworks that we interpreted as concrete courses of action and rationales. Expectation suggests a more linear, confidence-based orientation to what is presumed to come; anticipation, by contrast, implies active engagement with uncertainty and the mobilisation of practices in the present to make a future real. Both were visible in our participants' biographies. The mothers' efforts to raise their children in English were not simply reactive but deeply informed by their own earlier struggles with the language, such as their memories about inadequate schooling in English, the lack of linguistic preparation for international labour markets, and the emotional challenges of learning English as adults (Pilar defined it as "an agony").

These past difficulties were reframed as moral imperatives, fuelling a desire to ensure their children would not face the same obstacles. As such, these mothers' language ideologies indicate the action-orientated logics, animated by emotion, memory, and aspiration that underpinned their decisions. They carefully curated family life to reflect their linguistic goals: selecting English-speaking friends, enrolling children in extracurricular activities with native speakers, and travelling abroad for immersive experiences in the UK and Ireland. These practices constitute forms of anticipation which allow them to construct the future in the present.

Importantly, we also highlighted the adaptability of these ideologies. Initial expectations, such as the hope that English would become the family's home language, were not fully realised, particularly due to the fathers' limited English proficiency and lack of confidence. However, this did not derail the broader project. Instead, expectations were recalibrated, and strategies adjusted. The mothers' anticipatory practices proved more productive in sustaining the language goals, and by the end of primary school, their children were described as speaking English "better than their teachers at school" and fluently with native speakers. For the mothers, this achievement was not only a linguistic success but a lived realisation of their imagined futures, evidence of their agency, and validation of their parenting choices.

By attending to temporality in language biographies, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in FLP and sociolinguistics about how language ideologies, social class, and parental agency intersect. It shows how the desire to 'parent well' is deeply temporalised, embedded in collective histories, shaped by present conditions, and orientated towards imagined futures. English, in this context, is not just a language, but a medium through which these complex desires and investments are negotiated and enacted in contemporary Catalonia.

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Notes

1. English Immersion as Family Language Policy: Strategies, Mobilities and Investments (2020-2024) (ENIFALPO). R+D Project PID2019-106710GB-I00. Funding body: Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MICIN). Ana María Relaño Pastor and Eva Codó (PIs).
2. Importantly, these mothers overlook the potential for English language learning at home among a significant number of multilingual migrant families in Catalonia, particularly those from South Asia (mainly India (Dhebariya 2019) and Pakistan (Sabaté Dalmau 2021)) as well as from various African countries (Sabaté Dalmau 2018), whose linguistic repertoires often include English. Research indicates that these communities arrived in different migratory moments, notably in the 1970s and again in the 1990s, with South Asian groups becoming especially visible in the business sector as retailers in the areas where they have settled. However, the variety of English they speak is frequently deemed illegitimate (Codó 2008; Sabaté Dalmau 2021). By focussing on a group of African migrants, Sabaté Dalmau (2018) suggests that, in Catalonia, English is evaluated unequally depending on sociolinguistic regimes influenced by racialised language policies and broader geopolitical dynamics.
3. LODE (1985): Ley Orgánica del Derecho a la Educación– *Organic Law of the Right to Education*.
4. LOGSE (1990): Ley Organica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo de España – *Organic Law of the General Ordering of the Spanish Education System*
5. Original quote: 'En una década en la que la sociedad española manifiesta sus deseos de alcanzar el tren de la modernidad, la lengua inglesa se consolidó como uno de los instrumentos básicos de apertura hacia un nuevo status que apartaba los ojos de los españoles de nuestra realidad local en busca de nuevos horizontes europeos, horizontes que ya se sentían como propios'.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

[word]	contextual information
(1)	pause length in seconds
/	micropause
//	pause
:	lengthening of the sound of preceding letter
–	word cut-off
\	falling or final intonation
?	rising or question intonation
=	latching utterances
CAPS	volume of speech
°	markedly softer speech
@	laughter

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