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The glottopolitics of *Països Catalans* in the Valencian elections of 28 May 2023

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Abstract

Following the Spanish municipal elections on 28 May 2023, the conservative party *Partido Popular* (PP) and the far-right group *VOX* reached an agreement to govern the Valencian region in coalition. Notably, their agreement explicitly mentions the term *Països Catalans*. Employing a glottopolitical perspective with an approach based on linguistic ideologies and post-colonial studies, this article scrutinizes the reference in connection with the distinct electoral programs of PP and VOX. The analysis underscores a shared linguistic agenda between the two parties. I contend that PP opposes the inclusion of the Valencian region in the *Països Catalans* by asserting the authenticity of Valencian as a separate language from Catalan, positing it as representing the Valencian identity. In contrast, VOX advocates for the dominant role of Spanish across formal societal domains by emphasizing the anonymity of Spanish as the language of no one and everyone. However, the agreement shows that PP's electoral program can be read as denying the unique standing of the Valencian language in representing the Valencian identity, as the Valencian language is positioned at a parity with other Valencian cultural markers, such as music, artists, and folklore, all of which can ostensibly be expressed in Spanish. Consequently, the refusal of *Països Catalans* entails the disappearance of the Valencian *language*.

Keywords: *Països Catalans*, Valencian language, authenticity, anonymity, sociolinguistic naturalism, glottopolitics

1. Introduction

After the municipal elections held in Spain on 28 May 2023, the Valencian region, known as *Comunitat Valenciana* or *País Valencià*, underwent an important political transformation. Since 2015 a left-wing coalition constituted by *Partit Socialista del País Valencià* (PSPV) ('Socialist Party of the Valencian Region'), *Compromís* ('Commitment'), and *Podem (Unides Podem)* ('We Can' ['United We Can']) had led the Valencian Government,¹ with Ximo Puig, member of the PSPV, as the President of the *Generalitat Valenciana* ('Valencian Government') between 2015 and 2023. However, the results of the elections of 28 May 2023 made possible a new coalition between the conservative party *Partido Popular* (PP) ('Popular Party') and the far-right group VOX. Soon after the conservative victory, PP and VOX released the agreement between the two parties to constitute the government of the Valencian region with fifty main points (PP & VOX 2023; La Vanguardia Barcelona 2023). As a result, the current president of the *Generalitat Valenciana* is Carlos Mazón, member of the PP.² A member of VOX, Vicente Barrera Simó, is the Vice-President of the Valencian Government, and the same far-right party will oversee the conselleries ('offices of the regional government') of Culture, Agriculture, Justice, Interior, and Governance. Furthermore, María de los Llanos Massó Linares, a member of VOX, has been the President of the Valencian Courts since 26 June 2023.³

This is the first time that a far-right group takes part in the autonomous government of the Valencian region since the beginning of the democratic

¹ *Unides Podem* appeared as *Podem* in the elections of 2015 as it did not include *Esquerra Unida* ('United Left'). The Government was constituted through *L'Acord del Botànic* ('The Botanical Agreement'), formally endorsed at the Botanical Gardens of the University of Valencia on 11 June 2015. This accord marked a coalition between PSPV and *Compromís* with the support of *Podem*. On 12–13 June 2019 a new version of *L'Acord del Botànic*, known as *Botànic II* was entered into. This iteration saw the coalition for government formation encompassing PSPV, *Compromís*, and *Unides Podem*. *Unides Podem* comprised both *Podem* and *Esquerra Unida* (El País 2019). Ximo Puig renewed his presidency.

² His official inauguration took place on Thursday, 13 July 2023 and he took office on Monday, 16 July 2023.

³ *Les Corts Valencianes* are the legislative body of the Valencian Government.

transition in 1975. As a result, some of the ideas that were implicit during the government of PP (1995–2015),⁴ such as the opposition to pan-Catalanism, have been made more explicit due to the coalition between PP and VOX. Thus, in his first speech at the Valencian Courts on 20 September 2023, Vice-President Vicente Barrera Simó established opposition to pan-Catalanism as one of the main objectives of the *Conselleria de Cultura* (Rac1 2023). In the following pages, pan-Catalanism will be understood as the political ideology that supports the linguistic, cultural, and national links between all the territories where the Catalan language is spoken. While the term *Països Catalans* ('Catalan Countries') has been used mainly to refer to these Catalan-speaking territories as a linguistic community (see section 3), the political implications of this community vis-à-vis the Spanish State have also been emphasized.

In my study I analyze point 3 of the agreement between the two parties in which there is a direct reference and rejection of the term *Països Catalans*. I relate this direct reference to the political programs of PP and VOX. I show how, from a linguistic ideological point of view, the discussion whether the Valencian region belongs to the *Països Catalans* can be treated as an issue of linguistic authority, that is, how the Valencian language or variety should relate to society and what would be its position vis-à-vis Catalan and Spanish.⁵ In other words, how the issue of the inclusion of the Valencian region inside the *Països Catalans* relates to the dichotomy of authenticity and anonymity regarding Valencian, Catalan, and Spanish. Ultimately, I argue that the Valencian region is described by both political parties as the colonized other, whose linguistic identity is constructed by gazing at the Castilian colonizer: the imperial Other. Thus, according to PP and VOX, Valencian identity should be represented by Spanish, as it is an anonymous language that belongs to everyone and no one.

This article uses a perspective known as glottopolitics, which considers that language and politics are inseparable (Valle 2017, 17). Thus, we focus on three

⁴ Eduardo Zaplana (1995–2002), José Luis Olivas (2002–2003), Francisco Camps (2003–2011), and Alberto Fabra (2011–2015).

⁵ As the study will show, the inclusion of the Valencian region into the *Països Catalans* implies accepting that Valencian is a variety of Catalan and not a separate language (see section 3).

primary texts—the political programs of PP and VOX and the agreement between the two parties—and we adopt an interdisciplinary approach to analyze how language relates to power or authority and how certain social groups benefit at the expense of others (Valle et al. 2021, 19; Valle 2017, 18; Arnoux 2014). The analysis draws on theoretical concepts from North American linguistic anthropology (language ideologies, sociolinguistic naturalism, anonymity, authenticity), and post-colonial studies (palimpsest, the other/the Other).

2. Sociolinguistic naturalism

Kathryn A. Woolard posits the ideology of sociolinguistic naturalism as grounded in a presumed inherent link between language and society (Woolard 2016, 30–32; Joseph 2000). This connection yields two potential outcomes: on the one hand, certain languages are deemed authentic due to their alignment with the essence and ethos of a specific community (Woolard 2007, 131). The speaker's essence and identity eclipse the content expressed in the specific language. On the other hand, other languages are considered anonymous because they belong to everyone and no one (Woolard 2016, 7). In other words, they transcend individual associations and are naturally inclined towards global usage.⁶ Thus, in an anonymous language the message's substance takes precedence over the speaker's identity (Woolard 2007, 133).

These two ideologies of authenticity and anonymity may be used as opposites. However, they share a backdrop of sociolinguistic naturalism, where the relationship between language and society is portrayed as innate. Sociolinguistic naturalism opposes the “recognition of the agency of speaking subjects and . . . a historicized image of language as constructed by human action” (Woolard 2016, 30–31). Andrew Frank Bradley elaborates on this duality, framing anonymity and authenticity as

⁶ The ideological acceptance of the anonymity of a language carries with it the erasure of the historical circumstances that allowed that language to be considered anonymous. Bourdieu refers to the naturalization of this acceptance as *méconnaissance* (Bourdieu 1991; Woolard 2007).

the endpoints of a continuum or “poles of an axis of linguistic differentiation” in which, for example, an authentic language may become anonymous (Bradley 2020, 54; Gal 2012), especially if we emphasize the role of human will. As Woolard notes, human will can usher in a post-natural authenticity, where an individual not born into a language community chooses to join it willingly. “Authenticity can also be framed as ‘where you are going.’ It can be a goal, invested in the cultivation of a coherent self” (Woolard 2016, 33). This perspective underlines speakers’ agency, rejecting the notion of humans as passive recipients of language and identity.

Sociolinguistic naturalism, along with the concepts of authenticity and anonymity, are language ideologies. I define language ideologies as a set of ideas about language in general or about specific languages, shaped by unique historical, social, and political contexts. Notably, these ideas are presented as universally valid across different geographical or temporal contexts. Language ideologies are not inherently true or false, but “positioned and partial visions of the world” (Gal & Irvine 2019, 2), and they can be contested. Consequently, language ideologies require consistent reinforcement to maintain their facade of universal validity. They benefit certain social groups at the expense of others, resulting in an inequitable distribution of power. This power imbalance is inherently political and profoundly influences individuals’ behaviors (Joseph 2006, 2).

3. The issue of *Països Catalans*

PP and VOX present two apparently contrasting positions concerning the potential integration of the Valencian region inside the *Països Catalans*. First, the idea that Valencian should be regarded as a distinct language separate from Catalan. Advocates of this perspective, such as PP, argue that Valencian is an authentic language deserving of protection. They emphasize the role of Valencian as a cornerstone of cultural nationalism, where language is the basis of an identity.⁷ Furthermore, they posit that Valencian’s significance lies

⁷ According to Tony Crowley, “German Romantic thought, principally in the work of Herder, Fichte

not only in its intrinsic value but also as an alternative to prevent Catalan from becoming the dominant language representing Valencian identity. A second viewpoint favors the complete replacement of Valencian with Spanish in every single formal public setting, including education. This stance, embraced by the far-right group VOX and also reflected in the agreement between PP and VOX, involves the erasure of Valencian's existence. In this approach, the Valencian identity is attached to the imposing Spanish linguistic imperialism, portraying an aspect of colonialism. Spanish is depicted as an anonymous language, positioned to represent the identity of the Valencian region. While PP's program offers some leeway for a less rigid stance on cultural nationalism, this article shows (see section 4) how this new interpretation relegates language to a supplementary role concerning the land's historical and traditional heritage.

The agreement between PP and VOX includes a section on "LIBERTAD" ('freedom') consisting of five main points. Point three states:

Aprobaremos una ley de Señas de Identidad que proteja los valores y costumbres y tradiciones de la Comunidad Valenciana como parte esencial de la plural riqueza de España. Por ello, eliminaremos las subvenciones a las entidades o asociaciones que promuevan los "països catalans." (La Vanguardia Barcelona 2023)

[We will pass a Signs of Identity Act to protect the values, customs, and traditions of the Valencian Region as an essential part of the variety of the Spanish richness. Thus, we will eliminate any kind of subsidies to any entity or association that may support the idea of the "Catalan Countries."]⁸

While more in-depth analysis of this passage will follow, this section foregrounds the specific use of initial capital letters to denote potential group

and Humboldt had theorized the insight which had arisen from colonialism and turned it into a philosophical account of the relationship between language and national identity" (2007, 152–153). This Romantic thought was the basis of cultural nationalism.

⁸ All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

identities. It is noteworthy that both “Comunidad Valenciana” and “España” are capitalized, whereas the term “països catalans” is not. This capitalization choice implies a discernible hierarchy among the three political identities, positioning “Comunidad Valenciana” and “España” as superior to “països catalans.” In Catalan, it is customary to capitalize the initial letter of both words in *Països Catalans*. The absence of such capitalization may be interpreted as an attempt to diminish the significance of a concept that holds substantial relevance in Valencian politics, especially when the “Señas de Identidad” Act, that will purportedly safeguard the Valencian region against the perceived threat of *Països Catalans*, begins with capitalized initials.

The term *Països Catalans* emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century within the context of European cultural nationalism rooted in German Romanticism. Authors such as Herder, Fichte, and Humboldt had supported, from a philosophical point of view, the link between language and nation.⁹ After Philip V of Bourbon’s triumph in the Spanish War of Succession (1701–1715), and the issuance of the Decrees for *Nova Planta* (‘New Structure,’ adopted in 1707, 1715, and 1716),¹⁰ the Crown of Aragon ceased to exist and the Catalan language lost its administrative status in the former Catalan-speaking territories of the Crown of Aragon. The birth of the Catalan cultural movement known as *La Renaixença* (‘the rebirth’) in 1859,¹¹ reignited discussions about establishing a common language, particularly for literary purposes. In fact, the idea of a community united by a shared language had already been extolled in Bonaventura Carles Aribau’s 1833 poem “Oda a la Pàtria” (‘Ode to the Fatherland’). The term “Païses Catalanes” (‘Catalan Countries’) in Spanish first appeared in 1876 in the work of the Valencian author Benvingut Oliver i Esteller (Miralles & Solervicens 2007, 338), although the alternative *Catalunya Gran* (‘Greater Catalonia’) was suggested by Prat de la Riba in 1878 (Bradley 2020, 69). The term gained popularity, especially

⁹ See note 7.

¹⁰ 1707 for the Kingdom of Valencia and the Kingdom of Aragon, 1715 for the Balearic Islands except for Minorca, and 1716 for the Principality of Catalonia.

¹¹ 1859 was an important symbolic date since it marked the four hundredth anniversary of the death of the famous Valencian poet Ausiàs March (1400–1459).

after the publication of Joan Fuster's *Nosaltres, els valencians* (1962) in which the Valencian author advocated for the use of *Països Catalans*. The geographical boundaries of the *Països Catalans* are primarily determined by the presence of Catalan as a shared language:

The Catalan Countries . . . corresponds to the areas where Catalan is an autochthonous language variety, namely Catalonia, Northern Catalonia, Andorra, the Valencian Community, the Balearic Islands, the city of Alghero (*l'Alguer*), in Sardinia, a section of Aragon known as the *Franja de Ponent*, and a small area of the Autonomous Community of Murcia known as *El Carxe*. These regions share a complex relationship, with varying degrees of "Pan-Catalan" sentiment claimed by different groups at different times. (Hawkey 2018, 3–4)

In practical terms, the delineation of the *Països Catalans* on the map is not consistent. Generally, there is a tendency to encompass only the three major territories: Catalonia, the Valencian Region, and the Balearic Islands. Concerning the Valencian Region, it is common practice to include the non-Catalan speaking areas in the *Països Catalans* map (Bradley 2020, 68).

Although the term *Països Catalans* has generated controversy and is not universally accepted, especially within the Valencian region, the social, historical, and political context of Catalan-speaking lands, and particularly since the nineteenth century, favored the use of language as a criterion for defining the *Països Catalans*. This approach made it more straightforward to establish a natural link between the Catalan language and the Catalan identity, regardless of the term employed to denote the resulting political and cultural entity. An illustrative example can be found in Antonio Rubió i Lluch's presentation at the First International Congress of the Catalan language in Barcelona in 1906 (Rubió i Lluch 1908; *Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalan* 1908). In his discourse, Rubió i Lluch traced the evolution of Romance Languages throughout history and made several claims. Firstly, he noted that the Renaissance caused a rupture and a divide between the past and present of the peoples of most Romance languages, except for Catalan. While other Romance languages evolved into aristocratic literatures, Catalan

lost its standing as a literary language (1908, 75). However, the absence of influence from grammars and classical aristocratic literature enabled Catalan to maintain its identity and internal cohesion to a degree where the rupture between past and present was less pronounced compared to other Romance languages such as Spanish and French. In fact, the Catalan language remained closely intertwined with the people (1908, 77). Moreover, the language underwent a more natural evolution since it had not been an instrument of grand literature for three centuries (1908, 78). Catalan, in response to the Romantic quest for harmony between popular and written speech, contrasted with the typical Renaissance aristocratic concept of literature (1908, 79). Consequently, we may infer that, according to Rubió i Lluch, Catalan stood out as an authentic language in the Romance world, retaining and reflecting the genuine essence of the people who used it. This suggested organic relationship between Catalan and its speakers, which elevated the authenticity of the Catalan language, may be interpreted as justifying the existence of a cultural and political entity representing all the Catalan speakers—the *Països Catalans*.

Rubió i Lluch's narrative, as reproduced above, omits some aspects. For instance, at the Congress where he delivered his talk, there were two distinct groups representing the Valencian identity: the so-called *valencianistes*, who supported the linguistic separation between Catalan and Valencian, and the *ratpenistes*, who at that moment advocated for the unity of the Catalan language (Ferrando Francés 2018, 255).¹² The natural connection between language and group identity in the form of authenticity could be interpreted in two ways: Catalan representing the entire *Països Catalans*, or Valencian representing the former Kingdom of Valencia. This was fundamentally a linguistic ideological question that transcended language as an isolated entity.

¹² The group *Lo Rat Penat* ('The Bat') supported the unity of the language until 1977, when they began to defend the dialectal features of the Valencian variety. Later, they became secessionists (Ferrando Francés & Nicolás Amorós 2011, 507; Català Oltra 2014, 116).

3.1 Joan Fuster (1922–1992) and the Països Catalans

Joan Fuster was cognizant of this dilemma, but as a staunch advocate of the concept of Països Catalans, he emphasized that an isolated Valencian region separated from the rest of the Catalan-speaking areas was both a utopia and a betrayal of the Valencian essence:

I si cal reajustar i restaurar la nostra personalitat regional, ha d'ésser, naturalment dins un conjunt més ample i consistent[t]. Un País Valencià aïllat és una utopia i seria una traïció a la seva pròpia essència. Des de Salses a Guardamar, de Maó a Fraga, som un poble: un sol poble. Cada un dels nostres països n'és un fragment: o millor, un membre . . . Els Països Catalans no són solament un petit tros d'humanitat que parla una mateixa llengua. Són això, evidentment: però el fet de parlar una llengua, la mateixa, és el resultat d'una altra unitat anterior i origen de nous llaços d'unitat . . . Hi ha un interès explícit a dividirnos com a catalans. És una forma de reduir-nos a la més inefable inermitat. De vegades, sots capa de "valencianisme", "valenciania" o "valencianitat", hom intenta de separar-nos de la nostra comunitat natural. L'home del carrer es deixa entabanar per aquesta monstruosa perversió, que tots sabem a qui beneficia. Si el País Valencià—posem-nos en la perspectiva més localista—vol salvaguardar la seva personalitat ha d'ésser preservantse fidel a la seva catalanitat bàsica. (1962, 134–135)

[If we need to readjust or restore our regional personality, we must do it inside a bigger and more consistent group. An isolated Region of Valencia is a utopia that betrays our own essence. From Salses to Guardamar, from Maó to Fraga, we are one people, only one. Each one of our countries is a fragment or, if you prefer, a member . . . The Catalan Countries are not only a small piece of humanity speaking the same language. They obviously are, but speaking the same language is the result of a previous unity and, at the same time, the source of new things in common . . . There is an explicit attempt to divide us as Catalans to make us completely defenseless. Sometimes, under the terms "valencianisme," "valenciania," or "valencianitat" they try to separate us from our natural community. The common man is easy prey to this monstrous perversion, which is beneficial to you know whom. Even if we take the most localist perspective, the only effective way for the Valencian Region to preserve its personality lies in keeping faithful to its basic Catalan character.]

In this passage, Joan Fuster brings to the forefront three pivotal terms: “essence,” “natural community,” and “preserve.” He situates his speech firmly within the realm of sociolinguistic naturalism, where the authenticity of the Catalan language, forming the bedrock of *Països Catalans*’ existence, is considered natural, inherited, and thus impervious to human will. The task of human agency, in this context, is to avoid succumbing to the illusion that this intrinsic bond among the members of the Catalan Countries is non-existent. It is incumbent upon human will to safeguard the natural essence demonstrated by the shared language of the Catalan Countries. This authenticity of the Catalan language also possesses an anonymous facet, as it precludes the possibility of authenticating a separate Valencian language to represent a distinct cultural and linguistic political entity. Fuster contends that a Valencian linguistic authenticity would be unnatural and tantamount to a utopia.

However, Fuster’s perspective situates language in a middle ground. According to him, the Catalan Countries transcend mere linguistic commonality, although language alone serves as the linchpin connecting the past, the present, and the future. There is a common Catalan language because of a preceding historical common essence. Moreover, this shared language strengthens group cohesion by continually uncovering “new things in common.” This observation underscores the importance of historical linguistics, a discipline that has been evolving since the late eighteenth century, as noted by Deborah Cameron. Proficiency in language and its historical context enabled historians to gain a clearer understanding of the peoples they were studying. Language, in many ways, emerged as the most telling reflection of a people’s history, culture, and tradition (Cameron 2007, 278).¹³

Human agency is accorded value in Fuster’s perspective only when it reinforces the natural link between Catalan and the Catalan Countries. When human agency seeks to question this intrinsic connection, Fuster deems it a perilous manipulation contrary to nature. Such manipulation may be inferred

¹³ Cameron also explains that the founding of comparative historical linguistics after the discovery of proto-Indo-European led to the reconstruction of the narrative of social groups (2007, 278).

to favor those groups who intend to persuade Valencians to adopt Spanish as their primary language, thus bolstering the idea that Spanish is an anonymous language capable of including diverse identities. Fuster's passage serves as an illustrative example of sociolinguistic naturalism in which human agency assumes a supplementary role vis-à-vis nature.

As Ferrando Francés and Nicolàs Amorós (2011) explain, at the end of the sixties Valencian secessionism was used by the Franco regime to neutralize the center-left opposition, which supported both Valencian autonomy and linguistic and cultural revival. During the transition to democracy in the seventies, the center-right groups, gathering around the political party UCD (*Unión de Centro Democrático*, 'Unified Democratic Center'), openly opposed this cultural and linguistic revival that was inspired by pan-Catalanism. Instead of accepting the existence of a language shared with the rest of the Catalan-speaking lands, as was the case with the conservatives in the Balearic Islands, linguistic secessionism was used to achieve social and political control.¹⁴ Anti-Catalanism in the Valencian region became particularly virulent in the eighties, with the foundation of a new secessionist party with regards to language, *Unió Valenciana* ('Valencian Union'), and the ideas expressed in the conservative newspaper *Las Provincias*.¹⁵

There is no doubt that anti-Catalanism and linguistic secessionism influenced Valencian politics during the governments of the PSPV (1982–1995) and PP (1995–2015) (Ferrando Francés & Nicolás Amorós 2011, 425–426). PP tried to settle the dispute by creating *La Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua (AVL)* in 1998, when the conservative party was clearly dominant in the Valencian region (see section 3.2). Certainly, since the foundation of AVL, PP did not refrain from using anti-Catalanism to obtain votes during the elections, but once in power this

¹⁴ José Ramón Pin Arboledas, provincial secretary of UCD in the Valencian region, considered that linguistic secessionism was the most effective, imaginative, and Mediterranean way to oppose the project of the Països Catalans, as these cannot be understood without a linguistic unity (Flor 2012, 140).

¹⁵ *Unió Valenciana* obtained representation in both the Valencian Courts and the Spanish Parliament until 1999 (Ferrando Francés & Nicolás Amorós 2011, 426).

anti-Catalanism was not made as explicit. However, after the coalition between PP and VOX, linguistic secessionism and anti-Catalanism have been supported and expressed much more overtly.

In the subsequent sections of this article, I analyze how the electoral programs of PP and VOX in the municipal elections of 28 May 2023, as well as the subsequent agreement between the two parties, approached the authenticity and/or anonymity of Spanish, Valencian, and Catalan. Additionally, I describe the role of human agency from a linguistic ideological perspective within these programs.

3.2 Partido Popular and the exaltation of Valencian as an authentic language different from Catalan

The electoral program of PP serves as a primer illustration of the naturalistic association between language and identity that must remain unbroken. Notably, among the electoral programs of the Valencian elections of 28 May 2023, PP stands alone in explicitly addressing the term *Països Catalans*, which is described as both unnatural and unconstitutional. Within the framework of this unconstitutionality and the Valencian *Estatut d'Autonomia*,¹⁶ PP's electoral program implicitly disputes the unity of the Catalan language. Additionally, it subtly rejects the linguistic authority of the AVL, the institution that sets common linguistic norms for Catalan within the Valencian territory and that was founded in 1998 when PP was in power in the Valencian region.

According to PP's electoral program, "la lengua valenciana es uno de los símbolos más relevantes de nuestra identidad, a la que hay que prestar atención singular, como rasgo de nuestra personalidad y como una seña de identidad que, desde hace siglos, nos identifica y distingue" ("The Valencian language is one of the most relevant symbols of our identity. As such, we must take special

¹⁶ The *Estatut d'Autonomia* is a regional Constitution that constitutes the legal basis to govern the Valencian region. The *Estatut* occupies a supplementary position vis-à-vis the Spanish Constitution and cannot contradict it.

care of it since it is both one of our personality traits and a part of our identity that has identified and differentiated us for centuries') (PP 2023, 196). A noteworthy parallel emerges with Joan Fuster's depiction of the natural connection between the Catalan language and the identity of the Països Catalans. The use of terms like "personality traits," "identity," and "differentiated" underlines this naturalistic connection. Moreover, the text emphasizes the essential link between the Valencian language and Valencian identity through the phrase "for centuries," which conveys a sense of perpetuity. Yet the degree of exaltation of the Valencian language as representative of the Valencian identity is slightly less pronounced than Fuster's association between the Catalan language and the identity of Països Catalans. Thus, PP's electoral program describes the language as "one of the most relevant symbols of our identity" but refrains from proclaiming it as the most relevant. Nonetheless, the defense of Valencian as a distinct language requiring protection becomes more uncompromising when faced with the perceived threat of a uniform Catalan language encroaching upon the Valencian Region: "No consentiremos ninguna intromisión de otras lenguas cooficiales" ('We will not allow any other co-official language to interfere') (PP 2023, 31). Although the reference to the Catalan language is indirect, the implications are unmistakably clear: Catalan must not disrupt the natural connection between the Valencian language and the Valencian identity. Human agency should be channeled toward preserving this natural order.

Simultaneously, the use of the term *lengua valenciana* carries important linguistic and ideological implications. It aligns with the expression favored by Valencian linguistic secessionists, who advocate for the independence of the Valencian language from Catalan. This term is commonly employed by the so-called *blavers* ('the blue ones').¹⁷ This situation sheds light on the nomenclature of the Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua instead of Acadèmia de la

¹⁷ Blavers makes reference pejoratively to the supporters of Valencian linguistic secessionism (Bradley 2020, 172). The name refers to the specific blue section of the Valencian flag in comparison with the equivalent flag of Catalonia and the Autonomous Communities of Aragon and the Balearic Islands. For a masterful explanation of the linguistic and political ideology of *Blaverisme* see Flor (2012).

Llengua Valenciana (Bradley 2020, 91). The latter name would have posed considerable challenges for an institution committed to upholding the unity of the language spoken across all Catalan-speaking areas, including the Valencian region.¹⁸

In sum, PP's electoral program underlines its commitment to preserving the natural association between a distinct Valencian language and the Valencian identity. This stance is reinforced by emphasizing the unconstitutionality of the project of the Catalan Countries and by contesting the unity of the Catalan language. It is firmly asserted that public funds will not be allocated to projects that

persigan objetivos directamente contrarios a la Constitución, como la federación de territorios prohibida por el artículo 145, en particular, los inexistentes e inconstitucionales por algunos denominados Països Catalans . . . [y] menoscaben la autonomía de la Comunitat Valenciana en cuanto a la denominación de su territorio, bandera, himno y lengua propia que, según declara el Estatut d'Autonomia, es el valenciano." (PP 2023, 196)

[pursue objectives that go against the Constitution, such as any association of territories that is unreal and prohibited by the Constitution, like, for example, the so-called Catalan Countries . . . Moreover, public money will not be used for projects that diminish the autonomy of the Region of Valencia regarding the name of its territory, flag, anthem, and native language, which, as the Estatut d'Autonomia indicates, is Valencian.]

¹⁸ In the plenary session of 9 February 2005, the AVL established:

D'acord amb les aportacions més solvents de la romanística acumulades des del segle XIX fins a l'actualitat (estudis de gramàtica històrica, de dialectologia, de sintaxi, de lexicografia...), la llengua pròpia i històrica dels valencians, des del punt de vista de la filologia, és també la que compartixen les comunitats autònomes de Catalunya i de les Illes Balears i el Principat d'Andorra. Així mateix és la llengua històrica i pròpia d'altres territoris de l'antiga Corona d'Aragó (la franja oriental aragonesa, la ciutat sarda de l'Alguer i el departament francès dels Pirineus Orientals). Els diferents parlars de tots estos territoris constituïxen una llengua, és a dir, un mateix «sistema lingüístic». (Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua 2005)

In this instance, in contrast to the text of the agreement between PP and VOX mentioned in section 3, the initial letters of the expression Països Catalans are capitalized.¹⁹ However, the text of PP's electoral program intertwines the legal and essential or natural aspects of the issue. According to the program, the concept of the Catalan Countries runs counter to the Spanish Constitution as corroborated by article 145.²⁰ This legal basis amplifies the adjective "inexistentes" ('unreal' or 'fictional'), which suggests that the law substantiates the absence of a natural

[From a philological point of view, following the most reliable studies from Romance Linguistics since the 19th century (studies on historical grammar, dialectology, syntax, lexicography, etc.), the native and historical language of Valencians is the same as the one shared by the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, Balearic Islands, and the Principality of Andorra. Furthermore, it is the native and historical language of other territories of the former Crown of Aragon (the Aragonese Franja de Ponent, the Sardinian city of l'Alguer, and the French Department of the Eastern Pyrenees). The different varieties of all these territories constitute the same language, that is, the same "linguistic system."]

¹⁹ In the text of the agreement it appears as "països catalans."

²⁰ Title VIII, chapter three, article 145 of the Spanish Constitution indicates:

1. En ningún caso se admitirá la federación de Comunidades Autónomas
2. Los Estatutos podrán prever los supuestos, requisitos y términos en que las Comunidades Autónomas podrán celebrar convenios entre sí para la gestión y prestación de servicios propios de las mismas, así como el carácter y efectos de la correspondiente comunicación a las Cortes Generales. En los demás supuestos, los acuerdos de cooperación entre las Comunidades Autónomas necesitarán la autorización de las Cortes Generales. (Spain. Cortes Generales 1978, article 145)

- [1. Under no circumstances will a federation of Autonomous Communities be accepted.
2. The Regional Constitutions may foresee the requirements and conditions under which the Autonomous Communities will be allowed to hold agreements among them to provide their own services provided that they follow the proper procedure to communicate such procedures to the General Courts [Senate and Congress]. In any other case, any agreement of cooperation between Autonomous Communities will require the authorization of the General Courts.]

As Bradley explains, "the new legal framework of Spain which is outlined in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 prohibits the formation of new federations between existing communities (article 145), most likely a preventative measure in light of the unstable and unpredictable political climate following the Francoist dictatorship" (2020, 69)

connection between the Catalan language and *Països Catalans*. The statement presents a double bind, as it positions the Constitution, a human construct, above the realm of nature. Thus, it could be argued that placing nature in a supplementary position may hinder universal acceptance. However, within the broader context of mutual respect for the Spanish Constitution, it can be perceived as a natural and unquestionable text that elucidates the lack of natural connections between Catalan and *Països Catalans*. Conversely, Valencian is posited as the natural or authentic language of the Valencian region, as stipulated in the *Estatut d'Autonomia*. The *Estatut* appears to adhere to the laws of nature, assuming a supplementary role. Yet, within the context of the entire passage, if Valencian is deemed the natural language of the Valencian region as per the *Estatut*, and the existence of *Països Catalans* is deemed illegal as per the Constitution, one could argue or infer that Valencian constitutes a distinct language.²¹

We must bear in mind that the foundation of the *Països Catalans* lies in the presence of a common language across all its territories—Catalan.²² However, it may be contended that this idea could pose complications within an electoral program. According to the *Estatut d'Autonomia de la Comunitat Valenciana*, the AVL is the official regulatory institution for the Valencian language (Spain. *Corts Valencianes* 2006, article 7). The AVL was established in 1998 by the *Generalitat Valenciana*, which at that time was governed by the PP. As I previously explained,²³

²¹ Vicent Flor has explained that there are two ways of associating language with a territory or nation. While for authors like Joan Fuster, language would be the most important criterion or point of departure to define a nation, for the Blavers and, in this case, in the electoral program of PP, the territory or people determine the language and the nation (Flor 2012, 139).

²² Joan F. Mira differentiates between the unity of the language and the unity of a nation ([1997] 2015, 250). According to him, the *Països Catalans*, where the Valencian region is included, is a plural and useful term that refers to territories that constituted and constitute a linguistic and cultural community and that currently have a cultural relationship and share certain interests. However, the *Països Catalans* are not a political nation (Mira [1997] 2015, 252–253). As Català Oltra explains, this idea corresponds to the so-called *quarta via* ('fourth way'), which is based on a civic rather than cultural (mainly linguistic) nationalism. This fourth way constitutes a left or center-left progressive revisionism of Fuster's ideas (Català Oltra 2014, 117). In this case, the electoral program of PP rejects the idea of a political unity called *Països Catalans* to deny the unity of the Catalan language.

²³ See note 18.

in 2005 the AVL acknowledged that Valencian was a diatopic variety of the Catalan language and officially affirmed the unity of the Catalan language (Bradley 2020, 89). We must bear in mind that, at that junction, PP was still in power in the Valencian Government and the AVL statement represented the position of the Generalitat Valenciana (Mas Castells 2012). However, the electoral program of PP for the municipal elections of 2023 assumed a more explicit stance regarding linguistic secessionism, indirectly opposing or questioning the role of the AVL:

Defenderemos el valenciano frente a quienes, dentro y fuera de la Comunitat, pretendan, como objetivo declarado, imponer la unidad, sumisión y supeditación externa de la lengua valenciana al catalán . . . Apoyaremos el uso, enseñanza y difusión de las particularidades propias, tradicionales y populares del idioma valenciano . . . Instaremos al gobierno de España e instituciones académicas a reconocer titulaciones de filología valenciana . . . Devolveremos la oficialidad de los títulos de valenciano de *Lo Rat Penat*.

[We will defend the Valencian language against those who inside or outside the region are willing to impose the unity, submission, and external subordination of the Valencian language to Catalan . . . We will support the use, teaching, and dissemination of the typical, traditional, and popular peculiarities of the Valencian language . . . We will urge the Spanish Government and the Academic institutions to acknowledge the title of Valencian Studies . . . We will consider the academic qualifications granted by *Lo Rat Penat* as officially valid.]

It is in this context that the reference to *Lo Rat Penat* in the electoral program may be understood. *Lo Rat Penat* or *Societat d'Amadors de les Glòries de València* ('Society of Lovers of the Valencian Glories') was established in 1878 as an organization to advance the study of the language. It played a pivotal role in the restoration of the *Jocs Florals* ('Poetic Contests') of the Valencian *Renaixença* in 1879 (Ferrando Francés 2018, 254). In the Valencian region *Lo Rat Penat* accepted the expansion of the normative rules established by the Philological Section of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans ('Institute of Catalan Studies') in Barcelona in the first half of the twentieth century. This codification of the Catalan language by means of a grammar, dictionary, and orthography had been officially accepted in the

Valencian region in the so-called *Normes de Castelló* ('Rules of Castelló,' 1932). Yet, around 1977, Lo Rat Penat began to veer towards secessionism.²⁴ Defending the officiality of the titles offered by Lo Rat Penat implies accepting an alternative codification of the language to the one established by the *Normes de Castelló*, which was officially accepted by the AVL in 2002. The alternative to this codification was written in 1979 and was supported by Lo Rat Penat (Bradley 2020, 89).²⁵

4. The agreement between PP and VOX: The construction of the Valencian identity as a palimpsest

I include here again the text of point three of the agreement:

Aprobaremos una ley de Señas de Identidad que proteja los valores y costumbres y tradiciones de la Comunidad Valenciana como parte esencial de la plural riqueza de España. Por ello, eliminaremos las subvenciones a las entidades o asociaciones que promuevan los "països Catalans." (La Vanguardia Barcelona 2023)

[We will pass a Signs of Identity Law to protect the values, customs, and traditions of the Valencian region as an essential part of the variety of the Spanish richness. Thus, we will eliminate any kind of subsidies to any entity or association that supports the "Catalan Countries."]

Apart from the lack of capitalization of the term *Països Catalans* that has been analyzed in section 3, two important discursive features appear in the

²⁴ See note 12.

²⁵ This alternative codification is known as *Normes del Puig* ('Puig Norms'). While they were completed in 1979, the *Normes del Puig* were officially presented in 1981. On 26 August 2023, the President of the Valencian Courts, Llanos Massó, who is a member of VOX, argued in a Spanish-language social media post that Valencian was a different language from Catalan and that the *Normes del Puig* constituted the true codification of the Valencian language. Massó's statement does not abide by article 41 of the Estatut of the Valencian region, which indicates that the AVL is the only official institution in charge of the codification of the Valencian language (Molín 2023).

text: Firstly, there is no direct reference to the issue of language, which is one of the main criteria on which the existence of the Països Catalans is based. Second, the whole agreement is written in Spanish except for the term “països catalans,” which appears in quotation marks and in Catalan. The absence of any reference to the issue of language can be interpreted as a rejection of cultural nationalism and a support of the anonymity of Spanish at the expense of the erasure of the authenticity of Valencian as representing the Valencian essence. In other words, the Valencian identity can be maintained without the need of linguistic markers by using cultural resources such as genealogies, music, rituals, visual art, etc. This implies a denial of a natural bond or organic connection between community and mother tongue, as Humboldt had argued (Cameron 2007, 278–280). Thus, the approval of “a Signs of Identity Act to protect the values, customs, and traditions of the Valencian region as an essential part of the variety of the Spanish richness” implies that Valencians can keep their cultural legacy, their culture, and traditions by using Spanish. The use of the expression “Spanish richness” as well as the absence of any reference to the Valencian language connotes that Spanish is an anonymous language that represents everyone, including Valencians with their traditions and legacy.

Out of the 50 points of the agreement, only one pertains to the two official languages. In the education section, point 27 stipulates that “garantizaremos la libertad de educación, la libre elección de centro y la libre elección de la lengua de enseñanza entre las dos oficiales en todas las etapas educativas” (‘we will guarantee freedom of education, freedom to choose the educational center and the language of education in all levels out of the two official languages’) (La Vanguardia Barcelona 2023). When we compare this agreement with the original electoral programs of both PP and VOX, we observe that point 27 aligns more closely with PP’s program, where the issue of co-officiality is explicitly addressed. In VOX’s program, there is a reference to linguistic freedom in education but no allusion whatsoever to Valencian or co-officiality. Moreover, VOX’s program sets as objectives to enforce Spanish as the common language of instruction in all educational levels, and eliminate Valencian as a language requirement for becoming a teacher or civil servant:

Garantizar la libertad educativa y lingüística y la calidad de la enseñanza sin intromisiones ideológicas. Garantizaremos que el español sea lengua vehicular en todas las etapas educativas, eliminaremos toda normativa que atente contra la igualdad educativa entre los menores en las escuelas y eliminaremos el valenciano como requisito en el acceso a plazas de profesorado y personal de la administración. Desalojaremos a los activistas y asesores lingüísticos de las aulas y reforzaremos la inspección educativa. (VOX 2023)

[(We intend to) guarantee educational and linguistic freedom as well as a solid education without ideological interference. We will guarantee that Spanish is the dominant language in all educational levels. We will eliminate any law that may hinder equality in education among young students and we will eliminate the Valencian language as a requirement to become a teacher or a civil servant. We will get rid of language activists and advisers.]

VOX's program seems more stringent in its stance compared to the conditions articulated by PP. However, when examining the text of the agreement forged between the two parties to govern the Valencian region, a conspicuous absence is the term Valencian language. Moreover, upon closer scrutiny of PP's program after reviewing the agreement, one can discern elements of compatibility: the importance attached to Valencian tradition, folklore, and culture as potential substitutes for language in representing the Valencian identity. Within PP's program, language is typically depicted as just one among numerous facets of Valencian identity. It can be inferred that all these elements contribute proportionally to the safeguarding of Valencian identity. Additionally, in instances where there is no direct or indirect allusion to the perceived Catalan threat, both Spanish and Valencian are placed on an equal footing as markers of the Valencian identity:

Los símbolos, como la Denominación, Bandera, Himno y Día de la Comunitat Valenciana; así como las dos lenguas, y sus usos, oficiales en este territorio, castellana o español y valenciana . . . la música, bandas, orquestas, coros y sociedades musicales, cant d'estil, folclore e instrumentos tradicionales valencianos . . . (PP 2023, 193–194)

[Symbols just as the name, the flag, the anthem, the Day of the Valencian region, as well as the two official languages and the way they are used: Castilian or Spanish and Valencian . . . the music, the bands, the orchestras, the choruses, the music societies, the *cant d'estil*, the folklore and traditional Valencian instruments . . .]

The text can be read as the Valencian language becoming just another element in representing Valencian identity. The Valencian language is presented as disposable because there are other cultural aspects of the Valencian culture and, most importantly, there is another language that also symbolizes Valencian identity: "Castilian or Spanish." The use of these two names implies that Spanish is perceived as both authentic and anonymous. It is seen as authentic because it can represent the essence of Valencian identity as Valencian music, folklore, and the Valencian language do. At the same time, the dual naming of the Spanish language suggests its anonymity, as it used to be the language of Castilians and now it is the language of all Spaniards, including Valencians. It is the language of no one and everyone at the same time.

Consequently, VOX's electoral program, the agreement between PP and VOX to govern the Valencian region, and the electoral program of PP can be read as the construction of the Valencian identity as the colonial other. This Valencian colonial other, with a lower-case letter, has an unstable identity that is constructed by the Castilian Other, with a capital letter. The origin of the distinction between the *other* and the *Other* can be found in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic analysis of the formation of subjectivity and has been used in post-colonial theory. The *other* refers to the colonized subject who is dependent, whereas the *Other* is the imperial center that establishes the terms according to which the colonized other(s) construct their identity (Ashcroft, Gareth & Tiffin 2007, 154–156). In this case colonialism is understood not only as a forceful imposition but as an ideology that is accepted by the colonized subject. The Valencian other is colonized, has an unstable identity, and constructs a vision of the world by gazing at the dominant imperial Other (Ashcroft, Gareth & Tiffin 2007, 155–156; Fuss 1994; Boons-Grafé 1992; Spivak 1985; Lacan 1968). Thus, the Castilian Other colonizes and constructs the identity of the Valencian other in a top-down manner, erasing the

presence of former colonial Others that may have previously contributed to the construction of Valencian identity.

From this point of view, the former colonial Other would have been Catalonia. Joan Fuster's advocacy for the *Països Catalans* may be read as the Valencian willingness to construct or recover Valencian identity by accepting the remnants of the colonization of the imperial Catalan Other, mainly the Catalan language, and building a future from these remnants. As a result, it can be argued that Valencian identity is akin to a piece of writing resembling a palimpsest, where a former text has been erased to make way for a new text. In this instance, the former text written in Catalan has been partly overwritten by a new Castilian text. The defenders of *Països Catalans*, such as Joan Fuster, advocate for the recovery of the original Catalan text by nurturing the Catalan language and recognizing that the true Valencian identity lies in their Catalan past, present, and future. VOX and PP's electoral programs can be interpreted as the complete erasure of the Catalan colonial text in the Valencian identity. This erasure of the Catalan text can be achieved by erasing the Valencian-Catalan language, elevating the anonymity of the Spanish language, and asserting that Valencian identity does not hinge on language, but on other aspects such as music, culture, folklore. These historical and traditional elements can be expressed in Spanish. Once the Catalan text is eradicated, Valencian identity will no longer be a palimpsest and the Valencian language will end up disappearing (see Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007, 158–160). Therefore, both PP's electoral program and the agreement between PP and VOX demonstrate that opposing the concept of *Països Catalans* does not necessarily entail exalting a separate Valencian language to represent the essence of a Valencian identity.²⁶

²⁶ With regards to preserving the Valencian identity, Mira considers that there is a clear Castilian danger, whereas the Catalan danger is absent. Being part of the linguistic and cultural community known as *Països Catalans* would help exalt and maintain a Valencian identity ([1997] 2015, 253–254). Flor explains that the project of linguistic secessionism not only has the goal of opposing pan-Catalan nationalism, but also avoids the revitalization of the Valencian language. Thus, Valencian nationalism in the form of linguistic secessionism will support the status of Spanish as the hegemonic language, disguised as a rewarding bilingualism (2012, 140–141).

5. Conclusion

This article has underscored the significant role of language ideology within the electoral programs of the Spanish municipal elections held in the Valencian region on 28 May 2023. Given its scope, the study has exclusively examined the programs of two political right-wing parties, namely PP and VOX. However, the same theoretical approach may readily be extended to the electoral programs of Partit Socialista del País Valencià, Compromís, and Unides Podem.²⁷

The analysis of the reference to Països Catalans in both PP's electoral program and the agreement between PP and VOX, has shown that according to these two political parties, there is a conflict between two potential anonymous languages, Castilian and Catalan, that compete to colonize the Valencian region. Valencian linguistic identity should be represented exclusively by Spanish so that the Valencian region may avoid the threat of the potential linguistic anonymity of the Catalan language, which may destroy Valencian linguistic authenticity represented by the Valencian language. Both political parties share the idea that Castilian is the language that will keep Valencian identity safe. However, the result of this approach entails Castilian monolingualism and the disappearance of the Valencian-Catalan language in the Valencian region. PP's initial defense of a separate Valencian language leads to a denial of cultural nationalism, based on an organic relationship between language and identity, and ultimately, to the disappearance of any language different from Castilian in the Valencian region. In other words, the electoral programs of both PP and VOX have the same objective: to erase the Valencian-Catalan text on the palimpsest of Valencian identity and overwrite it with one single text in Castilian.

Moreover, within this study I have analyzed the issues of linguistic authenticity and anonymity as ideological exemplars of sociolinguistic naturalism, in which

²⁷ For a masterful analysis of the language ideology of the different Valencian political left and center-left parties in 2014, although with a different theoretical approach and a different corpus see Català Oltra (2014).

the primacy of nature over human will in shaping identity becomes evident. Nonetheless, it would be worthwhile to explore how human will can assume precedence in choosing one's linguistic identity in the form of post-natural authenticity, regardless of the language of origin. In other words, new learners of Valencian-Catalan may consider this language as their own, even if it was not the first language that they learned. This approach holds particular promise, especially within the Spanish-speaking areas of the Valencian region, notably in the domains of education and mass media.

Woolard provided a valuable example in her analysis of Catalonia (Woolard, 2016), and Bradley has effectively examined the situation with education in the Valencian region (Bradley 2020). This emerging field of study presents a complex avenue for further exploration.

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